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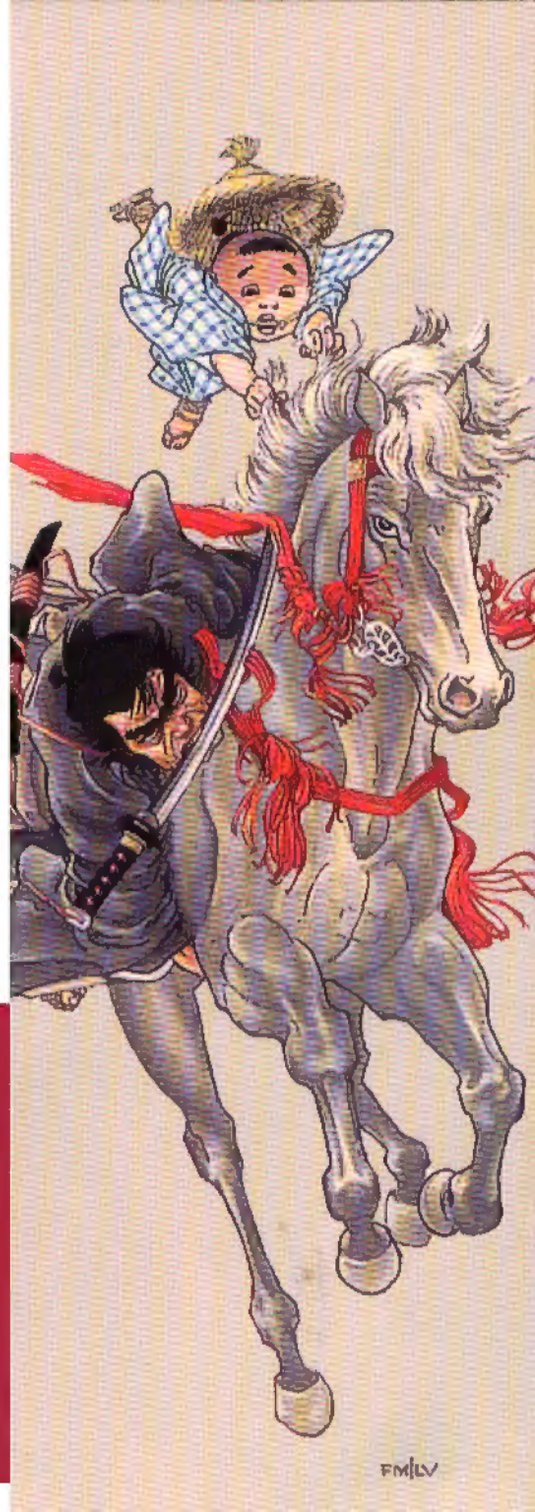
KAZUO KOIKE & GOSEKI KOJIMA

VOLUME 11

DARK HORSE COMICS

LONE WOLF AND CUB



VOLUME 11

TALISMAN OF HADES

By KAZUO KOIKE & GOSEKI KOJIMA

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TALISMAN OF HADES

子連れ狼

By KAZUO KOIKE & GOSEKI KOJIMA

VOLUME

11

A NOTE TO READERS

Lone Wolf and Cub is famous for its carefully researched re-creation of Edo-Period Japan. To preserve the flavor of the work, we have chosen to retain many Edo-Period terms that have no direct equivalents in English. Japanese is written in a mix of Chinese ideograms and a syllabic writing system, resulting in numerous synonyms. In the glossary, you may encounter words with multiple meanings. These are words written with Chinese ideograms that are pronounced the same but carry different meanings. A Japanese reader seeing the different ideograms would know instantly which meaning it is, but these synonyms can cause confusion when Japanese is spelled out in our alphabet. *O-yurushi o* (please forgive us)!

LONE WOLF AND CUB

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Talisman of Hades 9

Ailing Star 70

Thirteen Strings 130

A Poem for the Grave 248

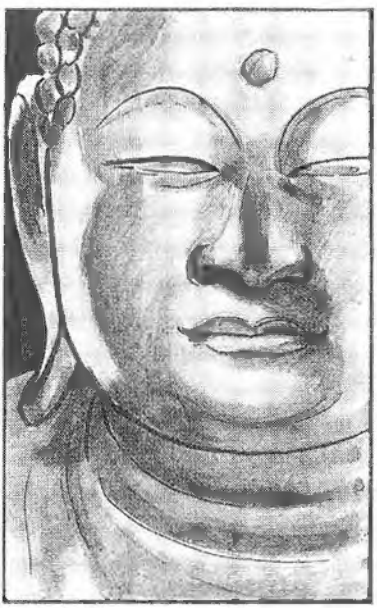
Glossary 307

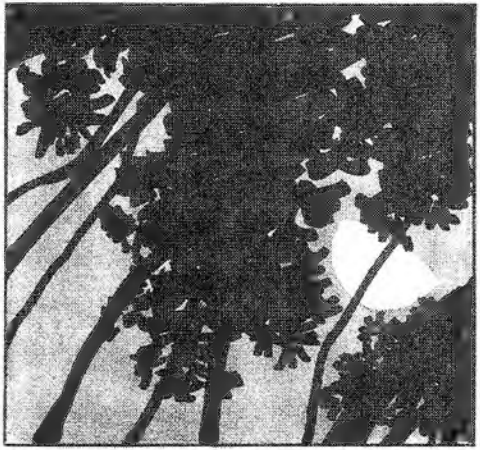
Creator Profiles 309

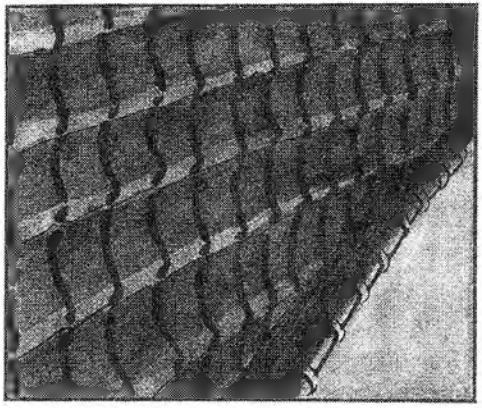
Art Gallery 311

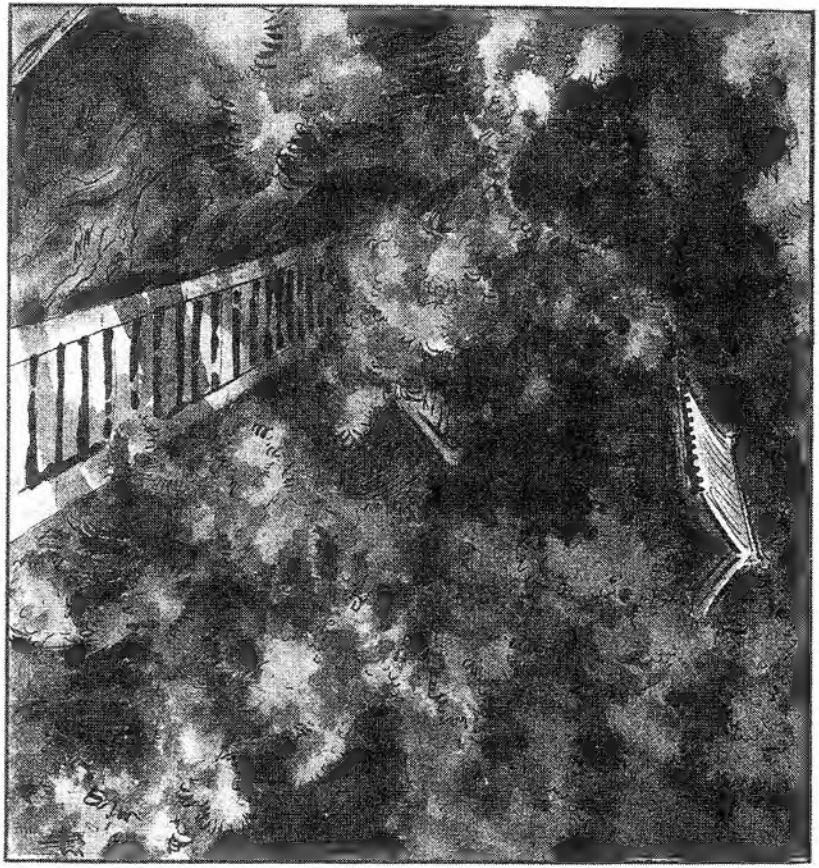
the fifty-fifth

Talisman of Hades



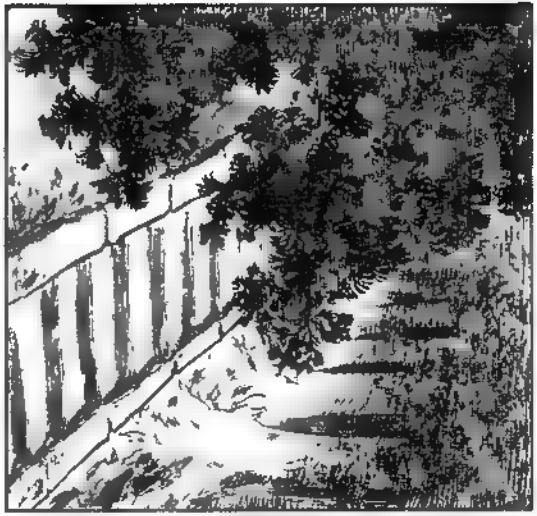


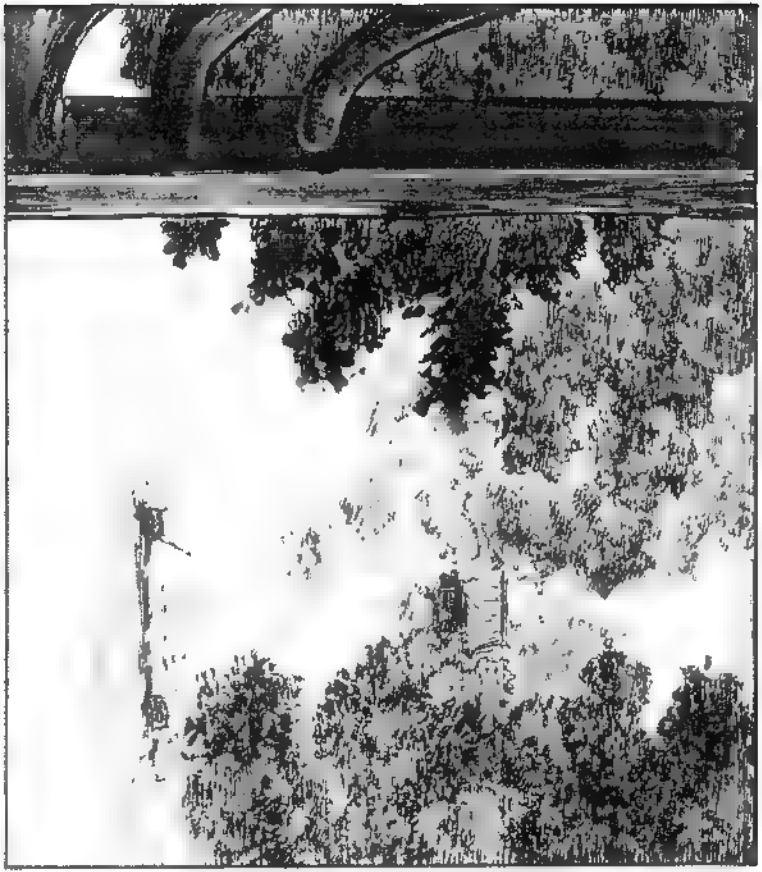




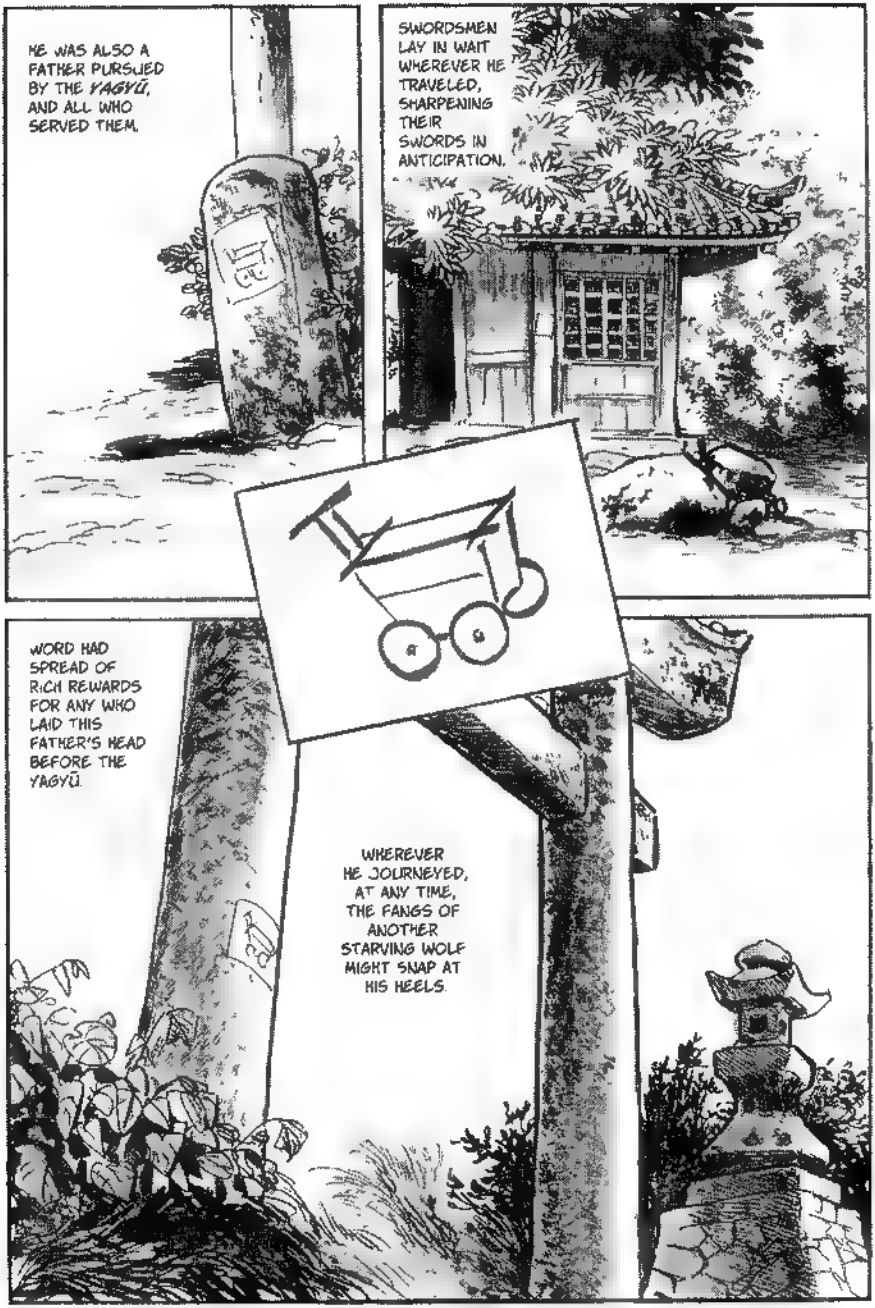
TAK

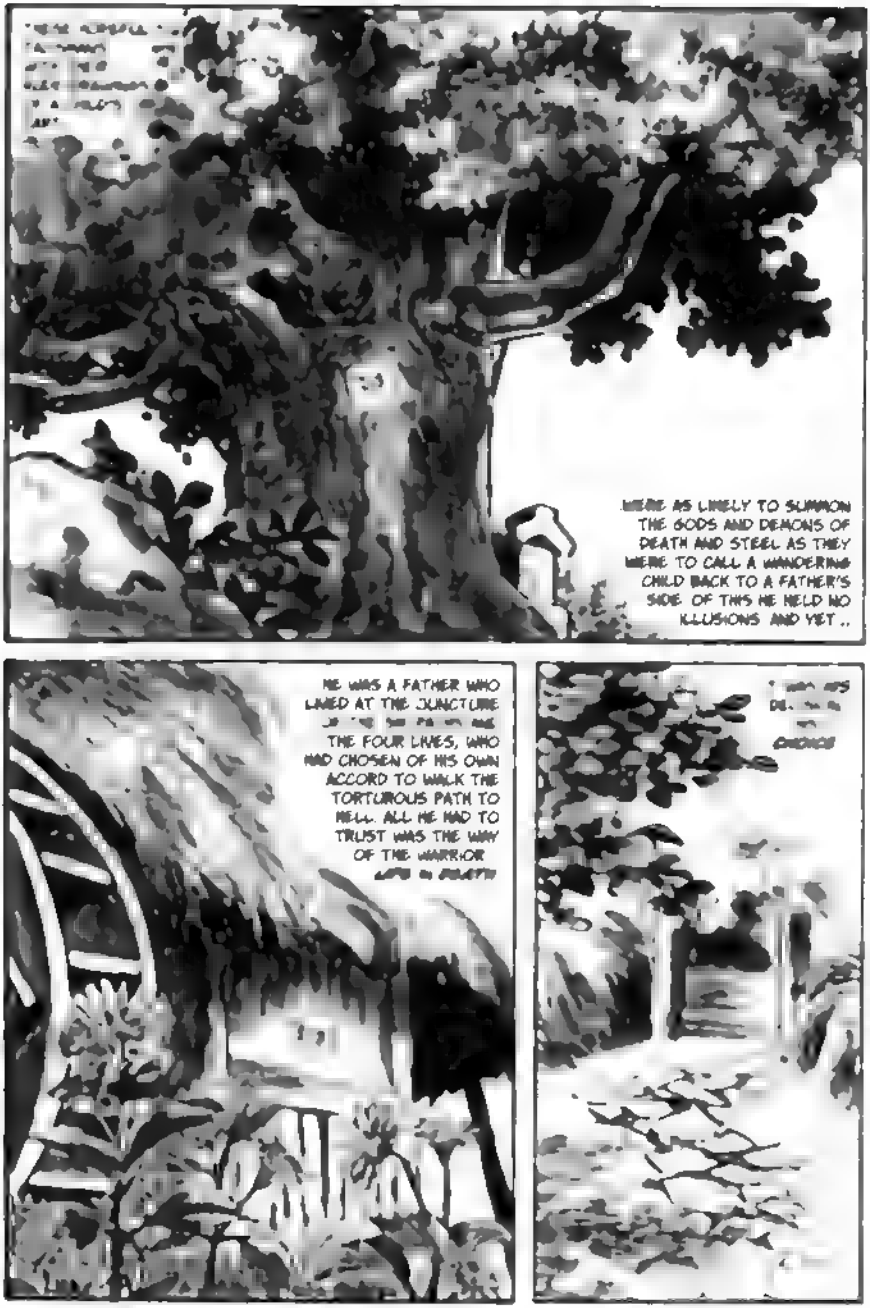
MISTER FIG! MISTER CARROT!
PEPPER AND MUSHROOM!!
BURDOCK 'N BARLEY!
SEVEN FLOWERS 'N EELS!
CUCUMBER, SWEET CORN!
MISTER FIG!
MISTER CARROT! PEPPER'N MUSHHHHROOM!
BURDOCK 'N BARLEY! SPRING FLOWERS, AND EELS!
CUUUCUMBER!
SWEET CORN!



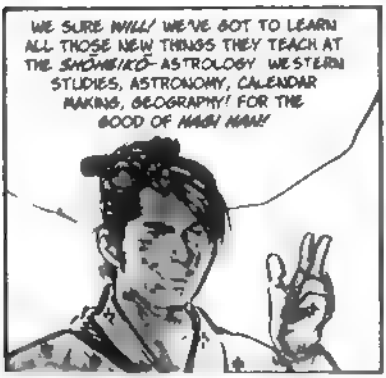


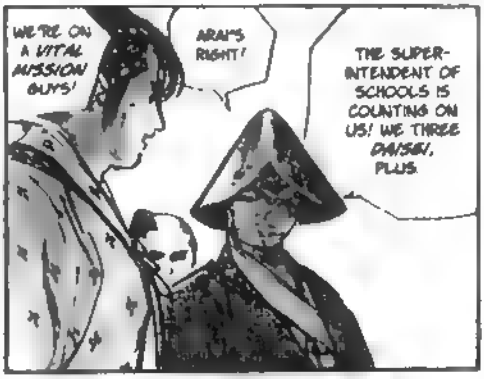
IT WAS A FATHER'S LAST, DESPERATE GAMBLE FOR FINDING HIS MISSING SON.
FOR THIS DESTINED PARENT AND CHILD, THESE FLIMSY TALISMANS WERE THE ONLY COMMUNICATION LEFT THEM IN AN UNFORGIVING WORLD
IF THE BOY SAW THEM, HE WOULD KNOW THE CART POINTED IN THE DIRECTION OF HIS FATHER.
AND SO THAT FATHER NOW POSTED PICTURES TO HIS CHILD, WHERE ONCE HE HAD PASTED THE TALISMANS OF *MEIFUMADŌ* TO INVITE IN CLIENTS OF DEATH AND ASSASSINATION.
TRULY THEY WERE A FAMILY WITH NO TOMORROW, THEIR FUTURE DENIED THEM BY CRUEL DESTINY


HE WAS ALSO A FATHER PURSUED BY THE YAGYŪ, AND ALL WHO SERVED THEM.
SWORDSMEN LAY IN WAIT WHEREVER HE TRAVELED, SHARPENING THEIR SWORDS IN ANTICIPATION.
WORD HAD SPREAD OF RICH REWARDS FOR ANY WHO LAID THIS FATHER'S HEAD BEFORE THE YAGYŪ.
WHEREVER HE JOURNEYED, AT ANY TIME, THE FANGS OF ANOTHER STARVING WOLF MIGHT SNAP AT HIS HEELS.

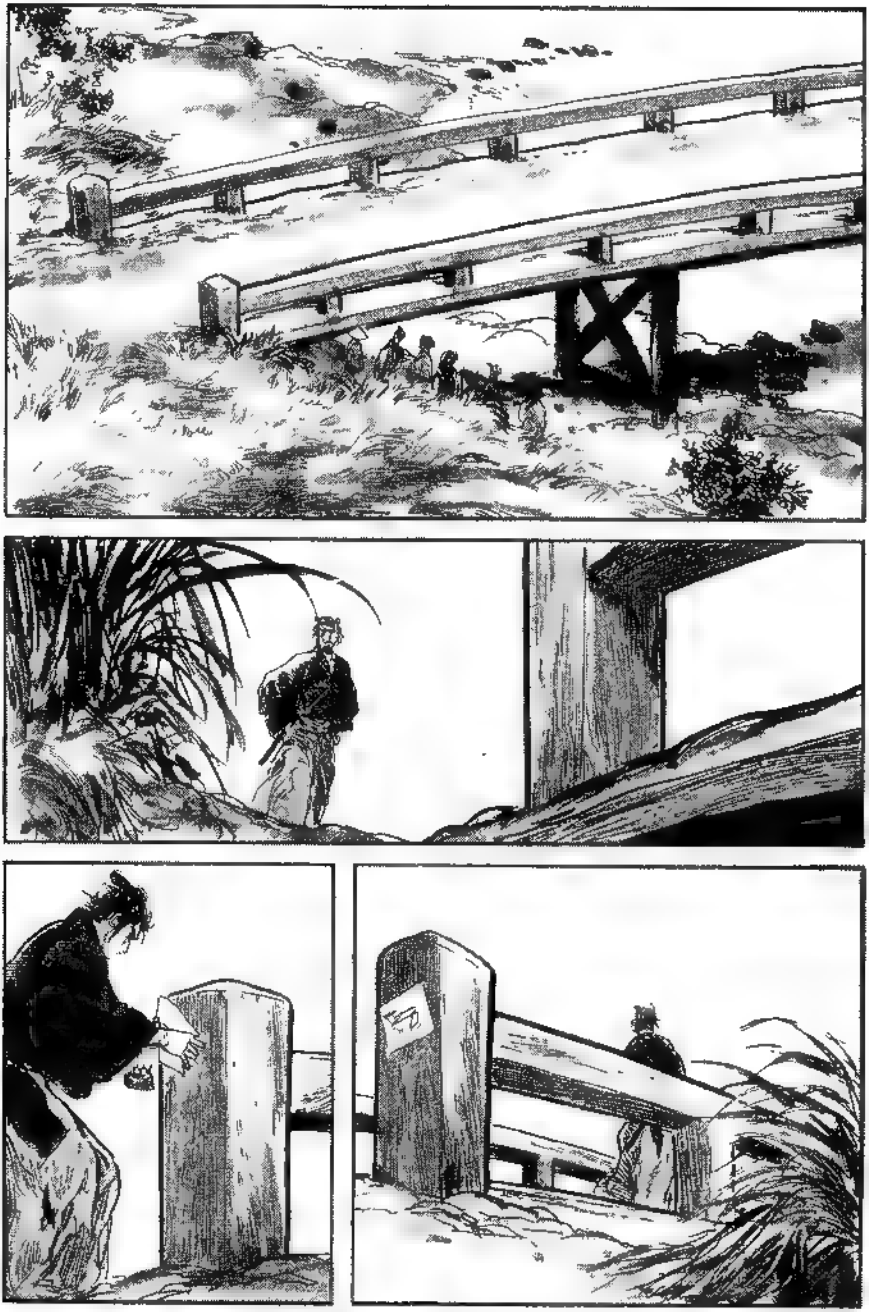

WERE AS LIKELY TO SUMMON THE GODS AND DEMONS OF DEATH AND STEEL AS THEY WERE TO CALL A WANDERING CHILD BACK TO A FATHER'S SIDE. OF THIS HE HELD NO ILLUSIONS AND YET ..
HE WAS A FATHER WHO LAIED AT THE JUNCTURE
THE FOUR LIVES, WHO HAD CHOSEN OF HIS OWN ACCORD TO WALK THE TORTUROUS PATH TO HELL. ALL HE HAD TO TRUST WAS THE WAY OF THE WARRIOR

DO YOU REALIZE WE BEAT OUT A *THOUSAND* OTHER *HATAHOTO* KIDS AT BOTH LEARNING *AND* MARTIAL ARTS JUST TO GET *INTO* THE *SHŌHEIKŌ ACADEMY*?
YEAH! AND WE'RE *READY* FOR IT! WE'RE THE *CREAM* OF THE *HAGI MEIRIN-KAN*! WE'LL SHOW THOSE *EDO* HOTSHOTS!


WE SURE *WILL*! WE'VE GOT TO LEARN ALL THOSE NEW THINGS THEY TEACH AT THE *SHŌHEIKŌ*- ASTROLOGY WESTERN STUDIES, ASTRONOMY, CALENDAR MAKING, GEOGRAPHY! FOR THE GOOD OF *HAGI HAN*!


WE'RE ON A *VITAL MISSION* GUYS!
ARA'S RIGHT!
THE SUPER-INTENDENT OF SCHOOLS IS COUNTING ON US! WE THREE *DAISEI*, PLUS

TATSUMA AND TANOMO, OUR TWO CHŪSEI .
...AND OUR ONE SHOSEI, ICHIBEI.
WE'RE THE CHOSEN FEW! HANDPICKED TO ATTEND THE SHŌHEIKŌ!
ENGRAVE THAT IN YOUR HEARTS, AND NEVER FORGET IT!
ICHIBEI! WHERE'S YOUR FIGHT?!
SIR ..?
WE'VE GOT A LONG WAY TO GO!
GET IT TOGETHER!
YES, SIR ..



YAHOOH
HA HA!
RIGHT! WE'VE WASHED OFF THE SWEAT, AND HAD SOME LUNCH!
LET'S HIT THE ROAD!
SMACK

WHAT'S THIS...?
BEATS ME!
JUST A CART A RIDDLE, MAYBE?
FORGET IT IT DOESN'T CONCERN US
MOVE OUT!!

ANOTHER ONE.
MM. THERE MAY BE MORE TO THIS THAN I THOUGHT!

ELDER BROTHER...? MAYBE IT'S A *CODE* FOR A *RENDEZVOUS* OR SOMETHING?
HMM. IF SOMEONE'S BEEN POSTING THEM ALL ALONG THE *HIGHWAY*, IT'S GOTTA BE *BIG*. BIGGER THAN A SINGLE VILLAGE.
IN WHICH CASE...*BANDITS*? A MESSAGE FOR A GANG OF *GRIFTERS*? HRMM...

OKAY! WE'VE GOT TO GET TO THE BOTTOM OF IT!
FOLLOW THOSE SIGNS!

YOU'RE PATHETIC! ALL OF YOU!
GRR ...!

shhhh
shhhh
HOH! LOOKS LIKE YOUR FIRST REAL JOURNEY, EH?
GOODNESS ME! SUCH TERRIBLE BLISTERS...
IN THIS CASE, IT'S BEST TO DRAIN THEM AND APPLY A HOT COMPRESS.
YET. YOU SEEM UNUSUALLY WORN OUT
AH, HAH! PLAYING IN THE RIVER, WERE YOU?!
YOU MUSTN'T DO THAT, GENTLEMEN, NO MATTER HOW HOT YOU GET IT FEELS COOL, BUT ALL THAT EFFORT ACTUALLY HEATS YOU UP MORE!

HEY .?!
FEELS BETTER, YES?
THANK YOU, REVEREND SIR.
BY THE WAY, YOU DON'T SUPPOSE I COULD ASK A FAVOR. ?
WHAT IS IT, SIR?
SOME OF MY FELLOW MONKS SHOULD PASS BY HERE SHORTLY. WOULD YOU GIVE THIS TO THEM?
CONSIDER IT DONE!
WELL, I'D BETTER HURRY...
KTANK

GUAAGHH!!
AH?!

CHKK

H-HALT!!
Y-YOU...!!

CUTTING A MAN DOWN LIKE A DOG, IN BROAD DAYLIGHT!!
IT'S BEYOND WORDS! A-A MURDERER?! A THIEF?!
KILLING ONE WHO SERVES THE BUDDHA! YOU'RE THE DEVIL HIMSELF!
AND TH-THAT'S NOT ALL! YOU'VE BEEN PUTTING UP SIGNS OF A CART AT EVERY LANDMARK ON THE HIGHWAY, YOU SCHEMER!
WE KNOW ALL ABOUT YOU!
YOU CAN'T ESCAPE US! WE'RE TAKING YOU TO THE NEAREST WAY STATION OR ENCAMPMENT!
I REFUSE
YOU CAN'T TREAT US LIKE SOME NAIVE YOUNGSTERS! SUBMIT! OR WE'LL TAKE YOU BY FORCE!
AND WHO ARE YOU?

STUDENTS OF THE HAGI MEIRIN-KAN/ EN ROUTE TO THE SHŌHEIKŌ!
YUKI HIKOICHIRŌ!
HIS YOUNGER BROTHER, GENJIRŌ!
ARAI JINSHIRŌ!
KUSAKABE TATSUMA!
TAMARU TANOMO!
K-K-KASAMATSU. . ICHIBEI!!
IDENTIFY YOURSELF!
. . . . . .
C-CUR! ACT TOUGH, WILL YOU!
SO BE IT!

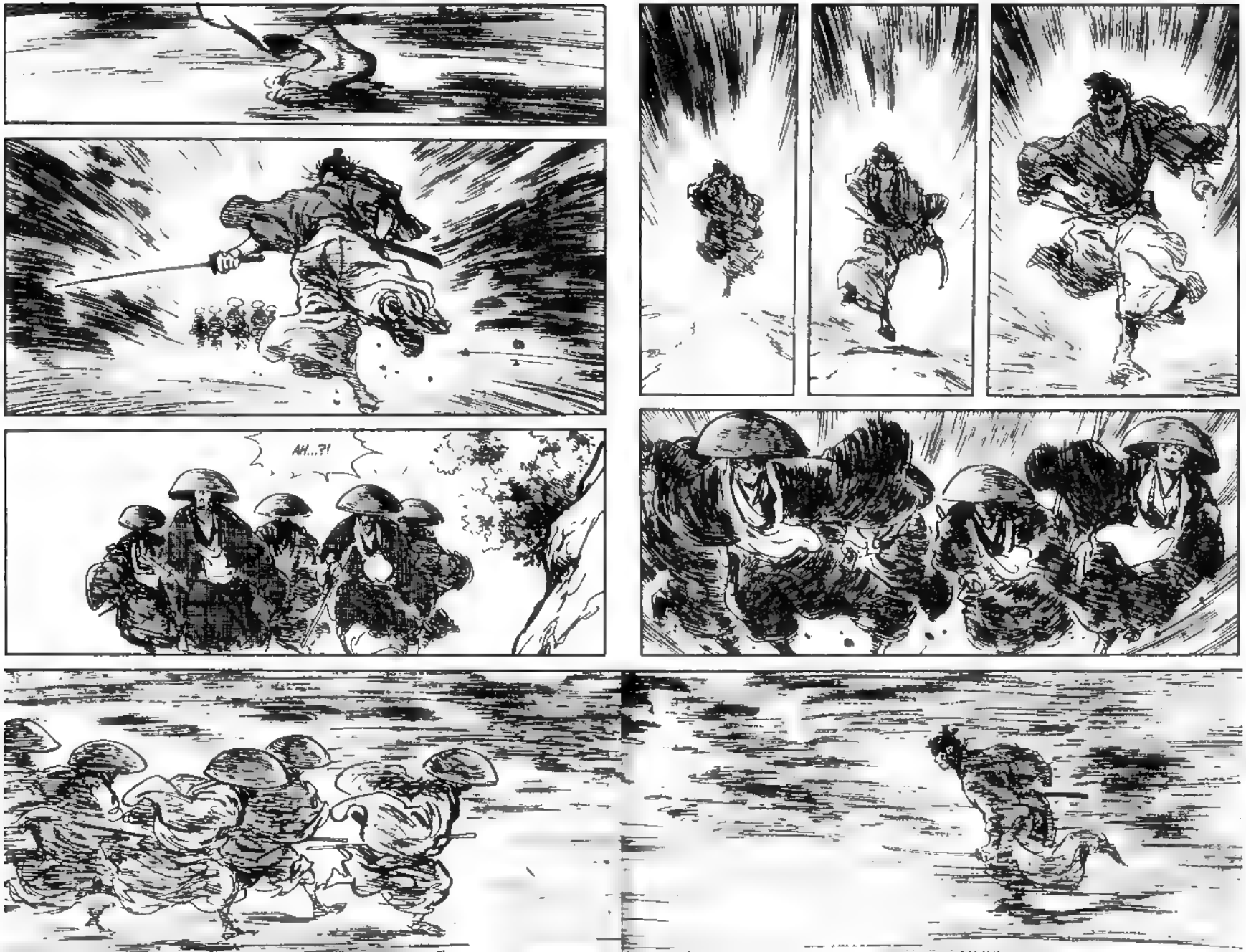
D-DROP YOUR WEAPON!
. . . .
. . . .

HRNN...?!

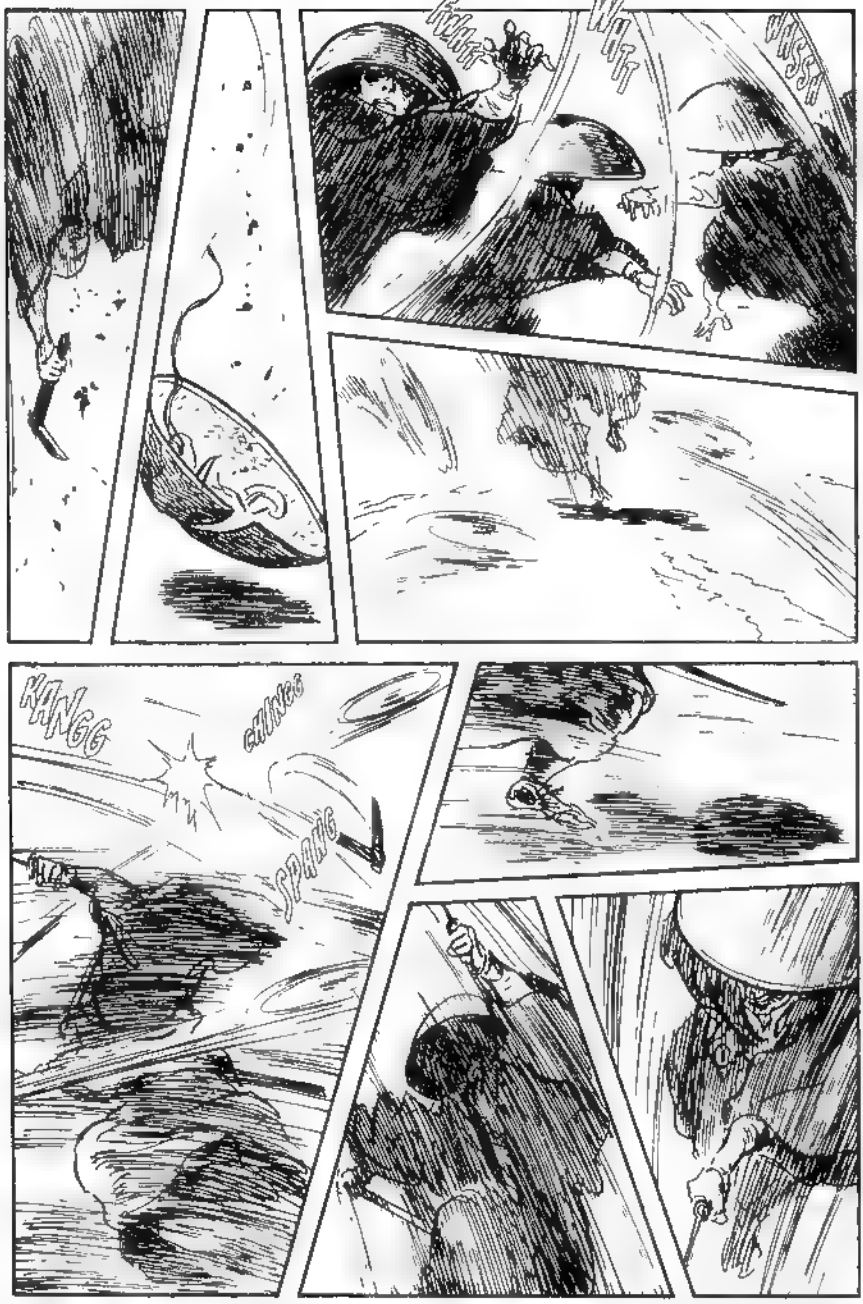
SKSSH
SCUM!!
YOU WANNA FIGHT?!

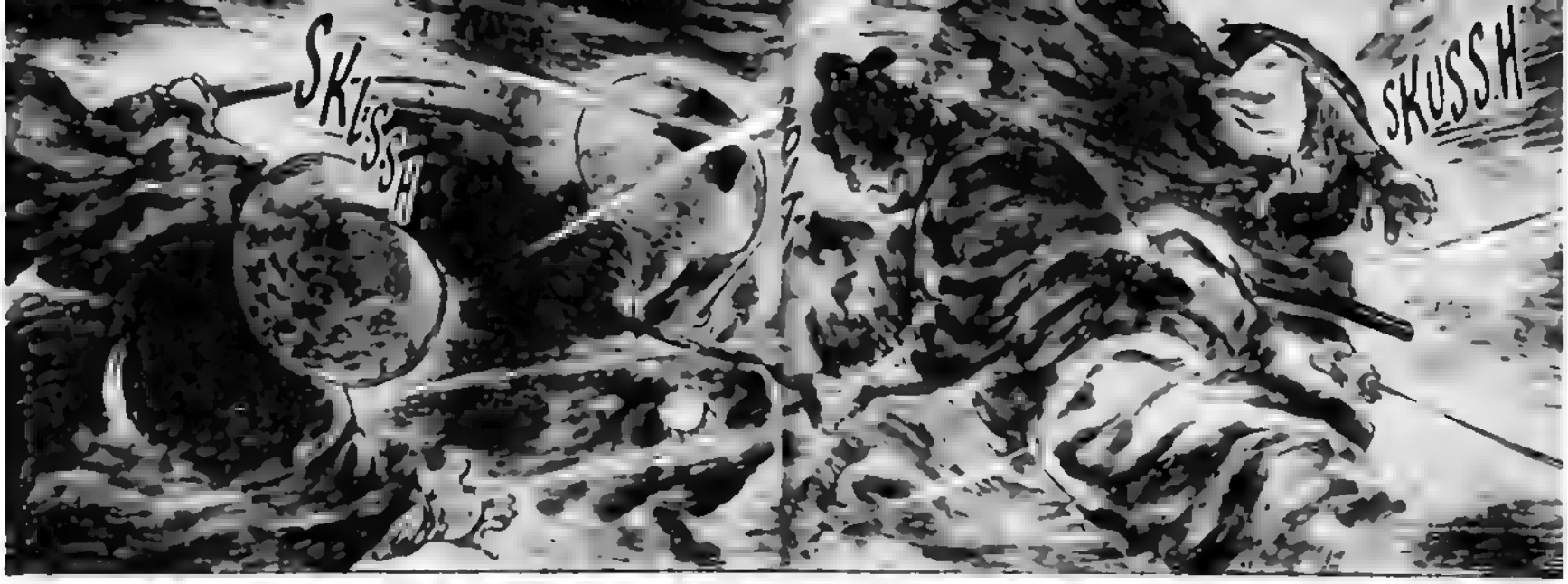
AAH!
SWHD
NGFF!

YA!!!
HYAA!
FWMP
RYAAAAA!
KRAK
NNGH!

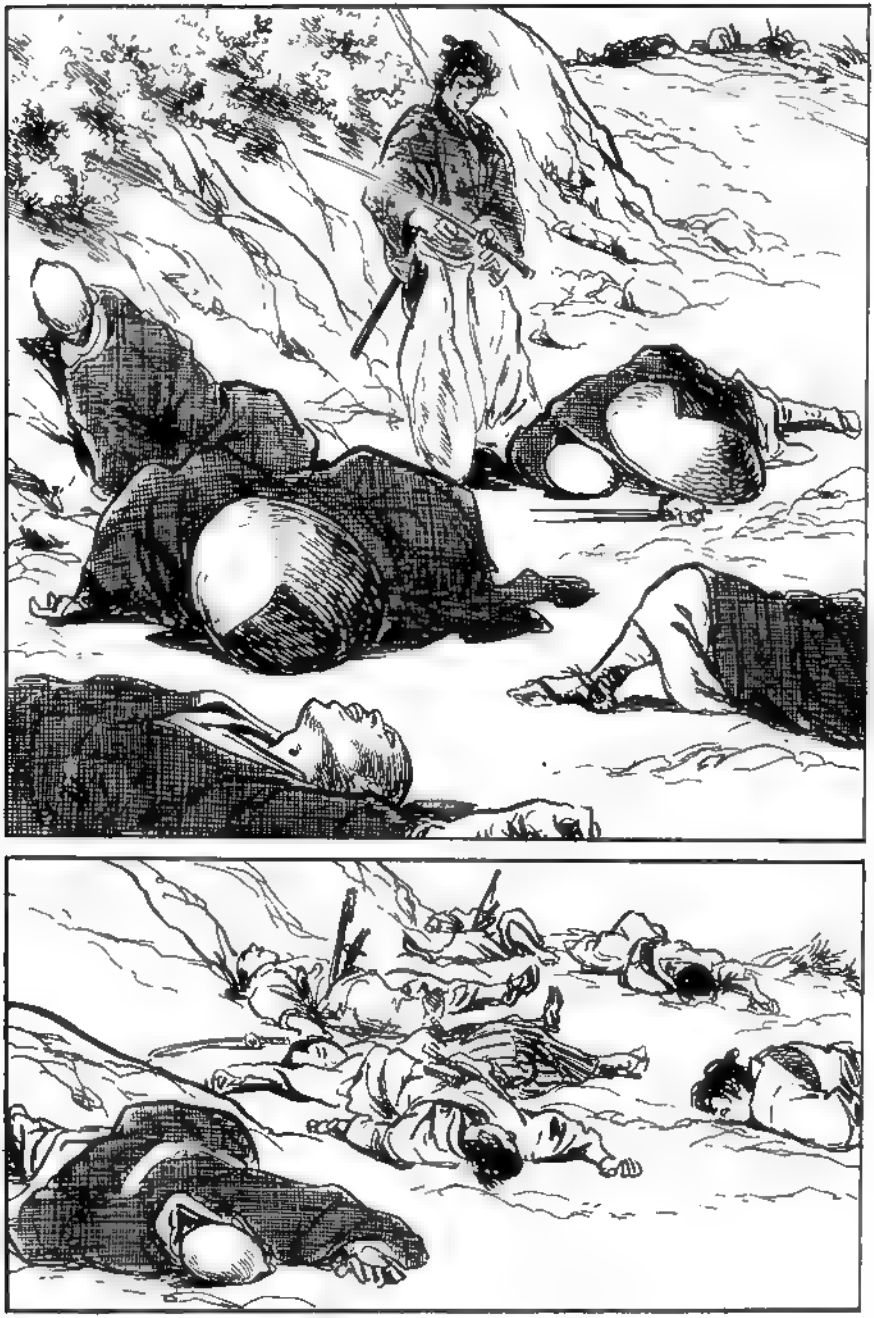

AH...?!

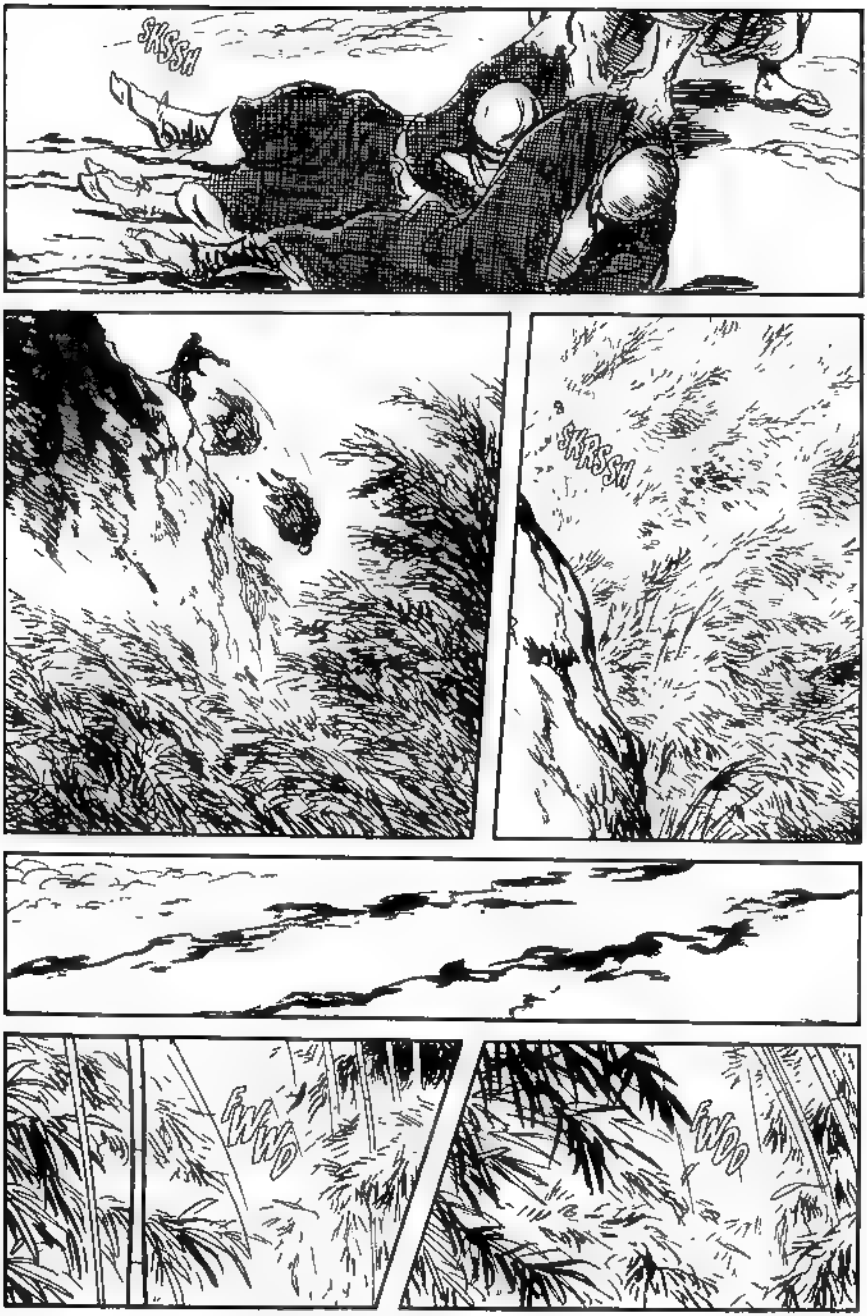
FSSST
SHKK
SKRSSH
NNG!


WHTT
WHSSH
KANGG
CHINGG
SPANG


SKI:S:SH
SKUSSH

CHKK



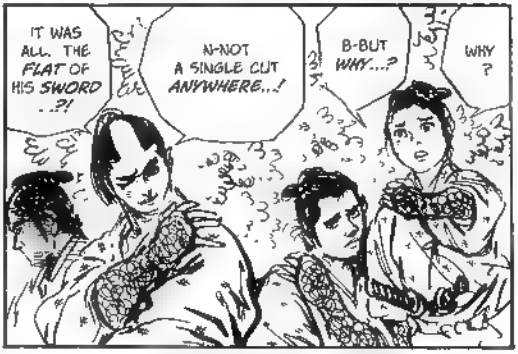

SKSSH
SKRSSH
FWD
FWD

AAAS
LAAS!
HAH?!
HMM..
UU.

AHH?!
WHAT TH—?!
WHA. WHAT HAPPENED?!

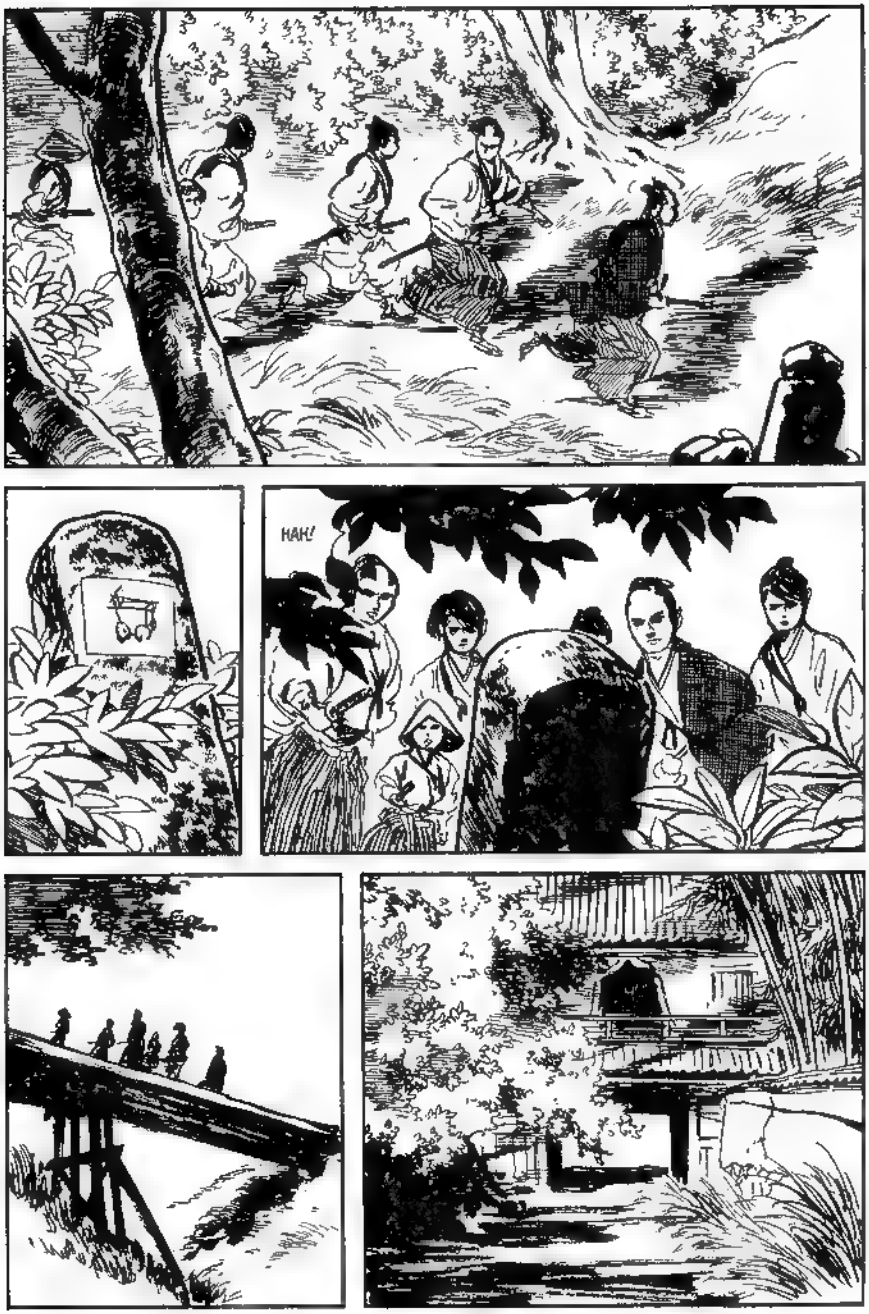
WHERE'D HE GO?!

HE DREW...! I SAW IT! WE FOUGHT HIM!


IT WAS ALL THE FLAT OF HIS SWORD...?!
N-NOT A SINGLE CUT ANYWHERE...!
B-BUT WHY...?
WHY?

THAT TRAVELING MONK...?
THE ONE HE KILLED...?
YEAH! IT WAS RIGHT HERE, I'M SURE OF IT

...BUT NOW THERE ISN'T EVEN ANY BLOOD
?!


HAH!

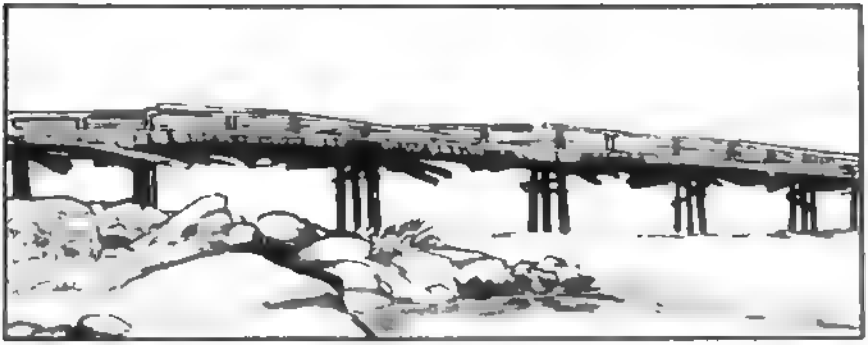
UPSET YE BE, EH?
THIS BE WHERE THE BUDDHA SITS. CALM YERSELVES DOWN.
HONORED PRIEST! HAVE YOU SEEN A RŌNIN ?!
THE ONE WITH THESE, YE MEAN?
YES!
IT'S A TALISMAN FOR A LOST CHILD

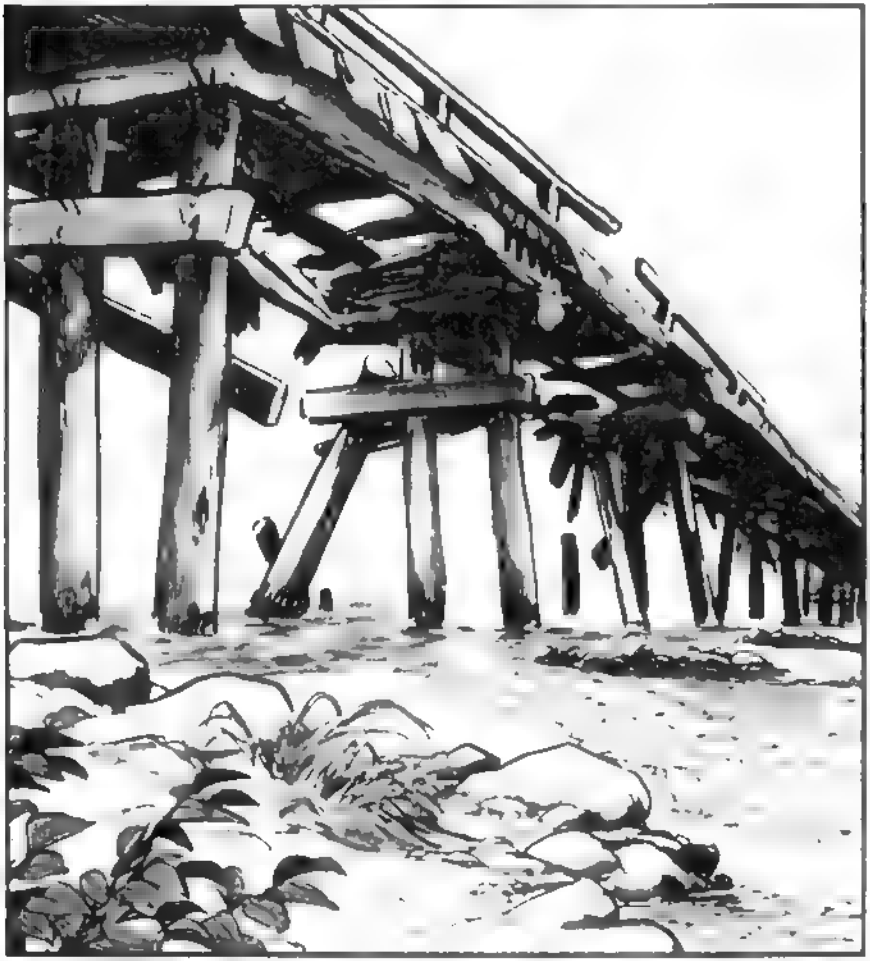
TO HELP HIM FIND HIS WAY, WHEN HE'S GONE ASTRAY
A LOST CHILD?
NOW THAT YE KNOW, RUN ALONG EVERY MAN FOLLOWS HIS OWN PATH IN LIFE. STOP YER FRETTING ABOUT OTHER FOLK'S PATHS, AND FOLLOW YER OWN.
BUT REVEREND. THE RŌNIN
KATSU!!

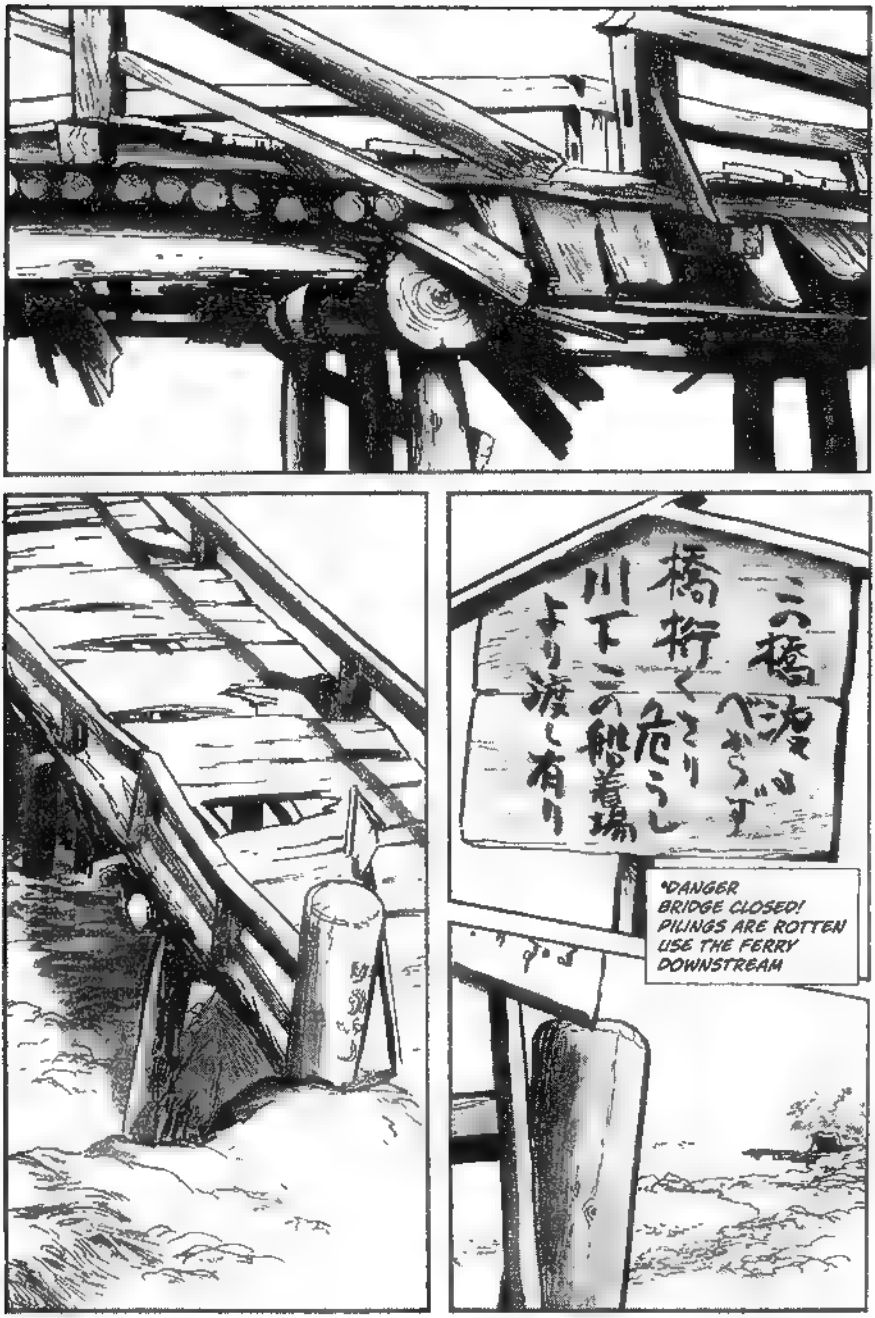
DAMN! SCARED ME TO DEATH!
YOU KNOW, HE MAY BE RIGHT
ABOUT WHAT?
OUR GOAL IS TO GET TO EDO AS QUICKLY AS POSSIBLE WE DON'T HAVE TIME TO WASTE
AND BESIDES
IF HE REALLY WAS A THIEF OR A KILLER, HE WOULDN'T HAVE LEFT ANY WITNESSES ALIVE. HE RETURNED OUR SWORDS TO THEIR SCABBARDS, LEFT US IN THE SHADE.
THERE'S SOMETHING ELSE GOING ON HERE! SOMETHING BIGGER THAN WE CAN IMAGINE.
SO LET'S GET GOING!
WE'RE BOUND FOR THE SHŌHEIKŌ!
RIGHT!!

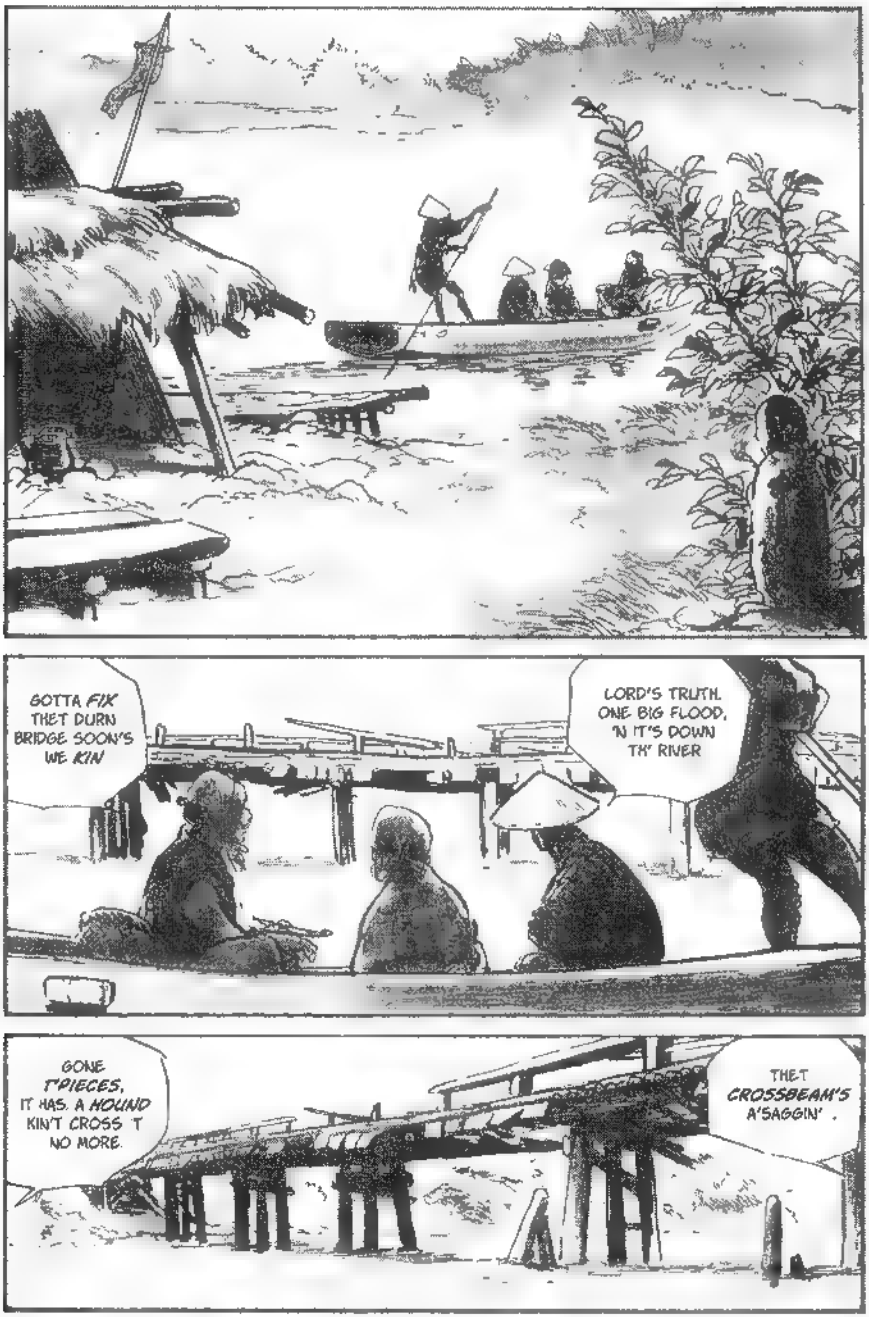
the fifty-sixth

Ailing Star





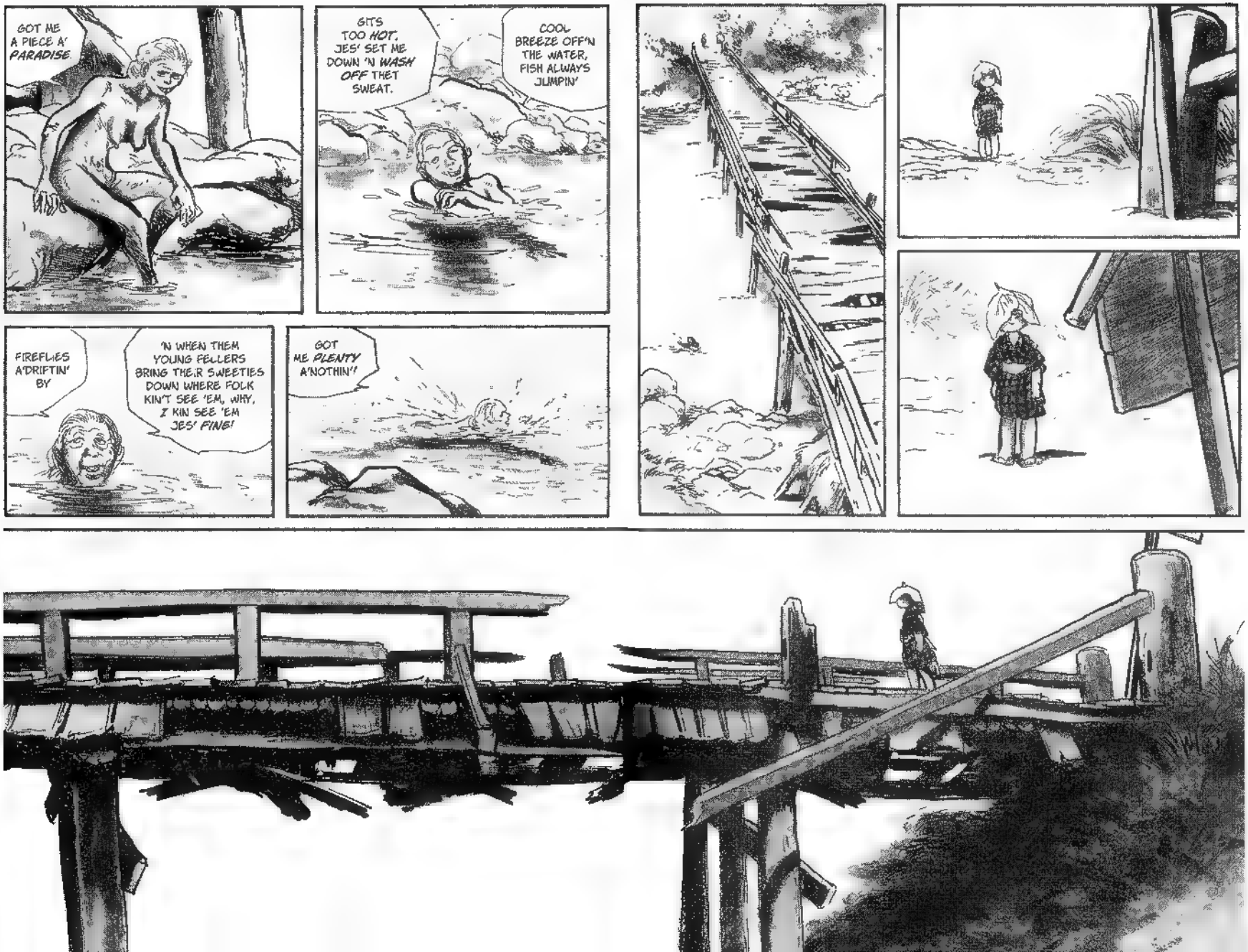

この橋渡るべからず
橋杭くさり危うし
川下この船着場
より渡し有り
*DANGER
BRIDGE CLOSED!
PILINGS ARE ROTTEN
USE THE FERRY
DOWNSTREAM


GOTTA FIX THET DURN BRIDGE SOON'S WE KIN
LORD'S TRUTH. ONE BIG FLOOD, 'N IT'S DOWN TH' RIVER
GONE T'PIECES, IT HAS. A HOUND KIN'T CROSS T NO MORE.
THET CROSSBEAM'S A'SAGGIN'.

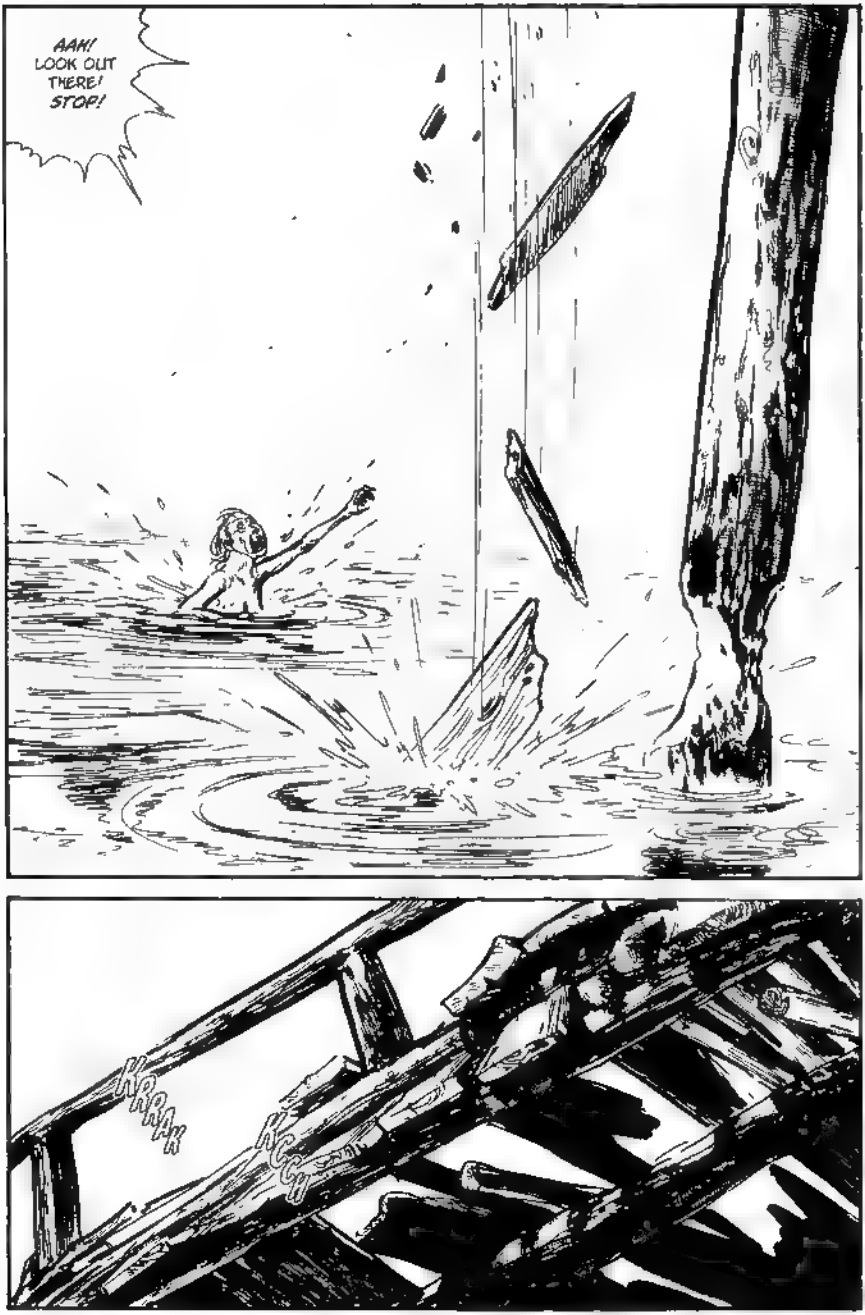
GONNA SQUASH O-ROKU'S HUT FLAT IT IS
CAN'T MOVE THAT OLD LADY WITH A HITCH A'COKEN I SWEAR
THE VILLAGE OFFICIAL YANKED HISELF BLUE IN TH' FACE "YE'LL GIT HURT YUH GOTTA MOVE!" BUT SHE WON'T BUDGE
FIGGER SHE WANTS TO DIE WITH THE BRIDGE?
A ROTTEN OL' BRIDGE 'N A ROTTEN OL TROUBLEMAKER IT'S A MESS FOR SURE

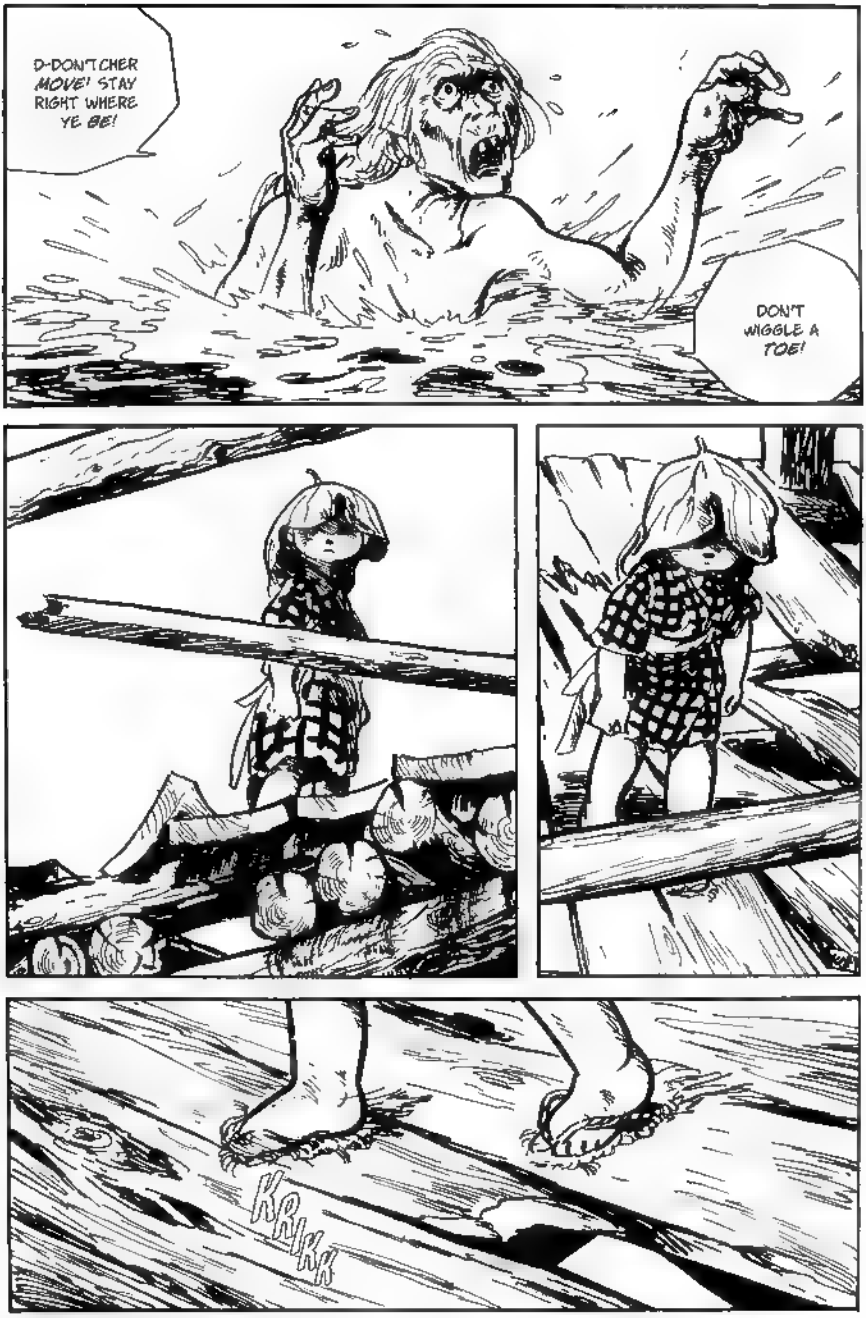
HMPH! TALKIN' 'BOUT ME AG'IN, IS YE? MEDDLIN' RATS..!

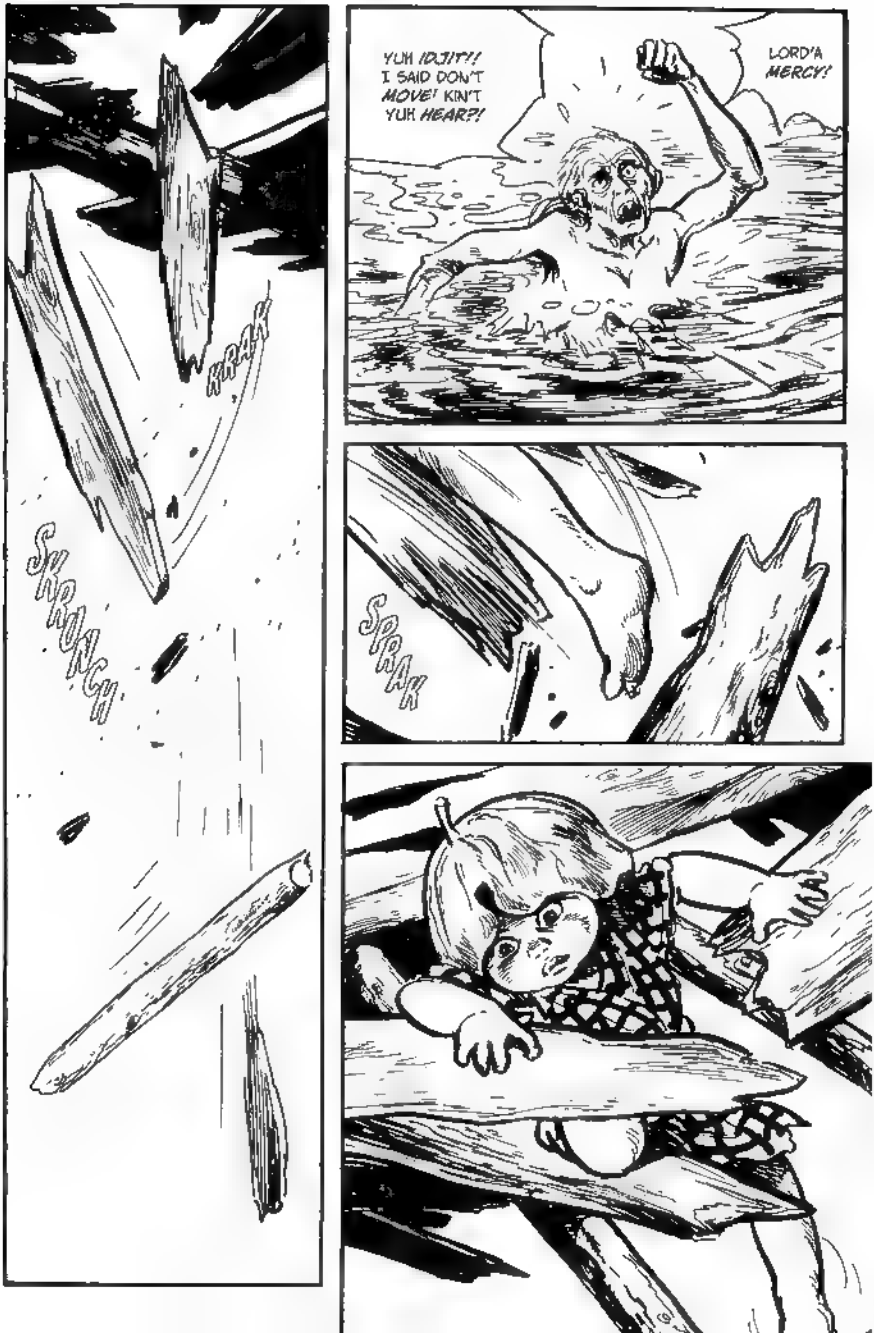
DON'T CARE WHAT YE SAYS! I AIN'T MOVIN'


GOT ME A PIECE A' PARADISE.
GITS TOO HOT. JES' SET ME DOWN 'N WASH OFF THET SWEAT.
COOL BREEZE OFF'N THE WATER, FISH ALWAYS JUMPIN'
FIREFLIES A'DRIFTIN' BY
'N WHEN THEM YOUNG FELLERS BRING THEIR SWEETIES DOWN WHERE FOLK KIN'T SEE 'EM, WHY, I KIN SEE 'EM JES' FINE!
GOT ME PLENTY A'NOTHIN'!

WHAT CHER DOINT IN
OI' QUIN


AAH! LOOK OUT THERE! STOP!
KRRAK
KCH


D-DON'TCHER MOVE! STAY RIGHT WHERE YE BE!
DON'T WIGGLE A TOE!
KRKK


YUH IDJIT?! I SAID DON'T MOVE! KIN'T YUH HEAR?!
LORD'A MERCY!
KRAK
SKRUNCH
SPRAK

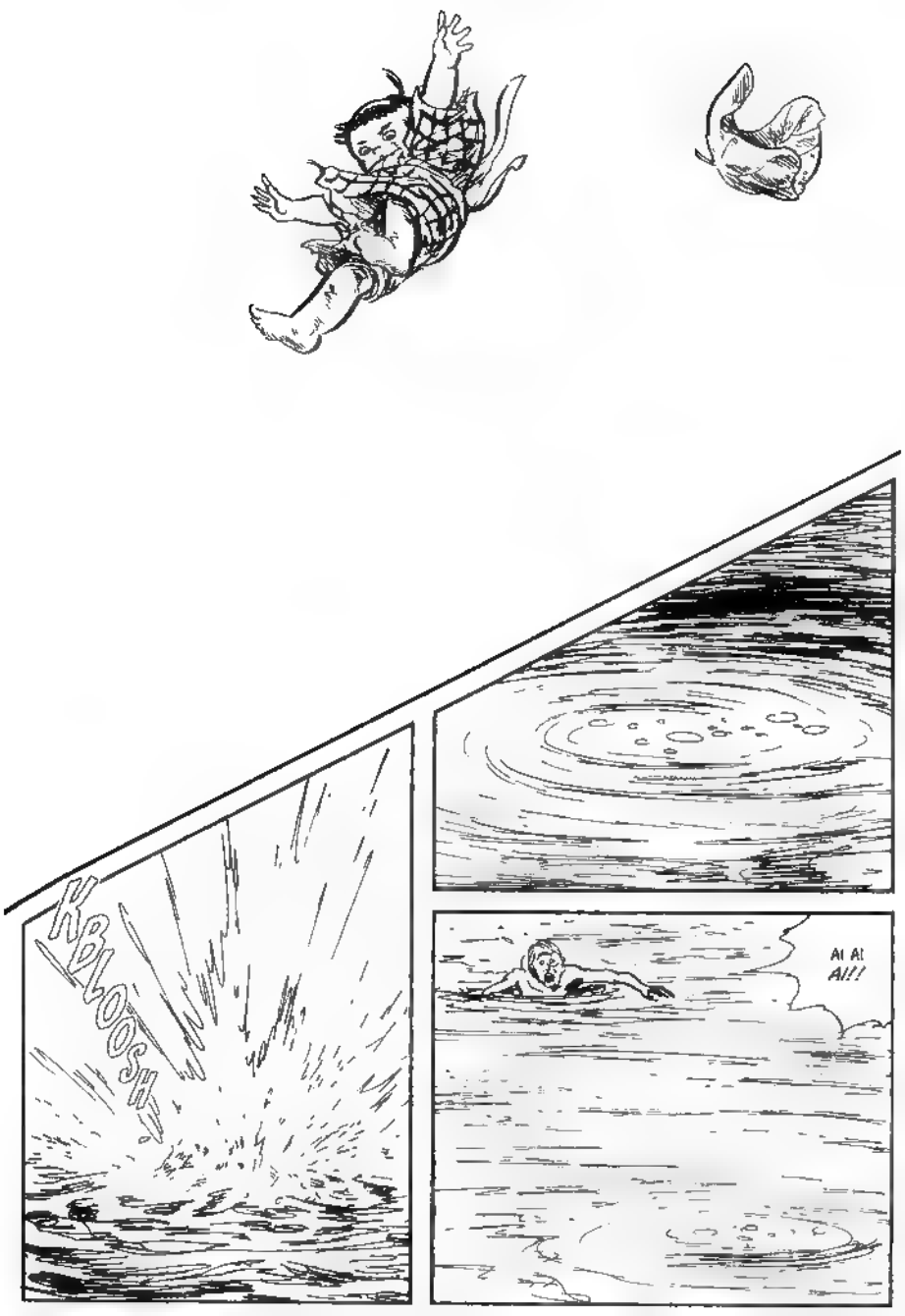
AIYAA!!
I KIN'T WATCH, KIN'T *LOOK*
KIN'T. LOOK.
NOT A *PEEK*
KIN YA HEAR ME? LISTEN TUH *GRANNY!* DO *JES'* WHAT SHE SAY!

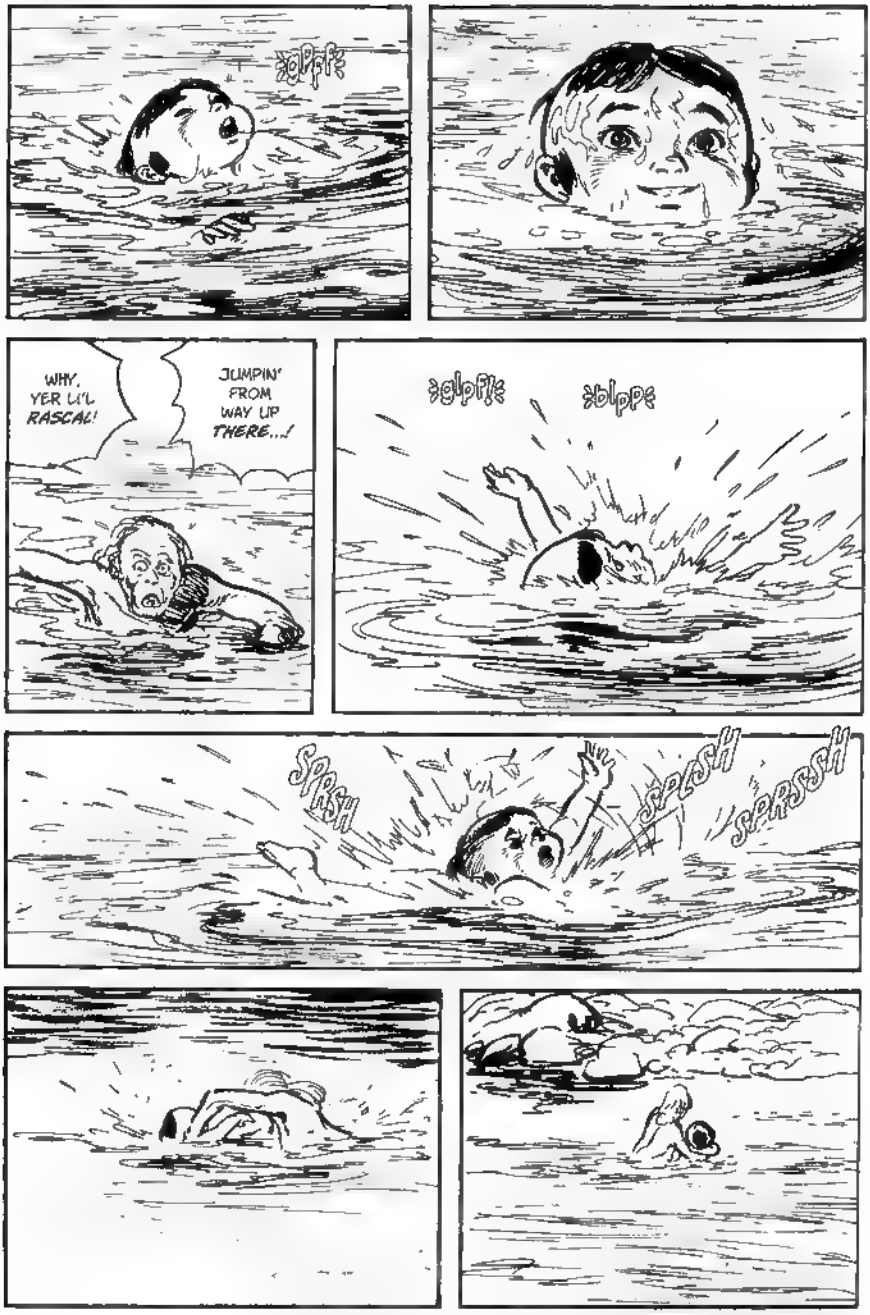
Y'GOTTA STAY *PUT*, Y'HEAR?!
YOU'N YER SILLY OL' *'TATER LEAF* HAT! TOOK *ANOTHER* YEAR OFF'N MY *LIFE*, Y'DID!
KRRK
SNNAK
....
THET OL' BRIDGE BE *ROTTEN* THROUGH 'N THROUGH! IF'N Y'*BUDGE*, T'LL *ALL* COME DOWN!

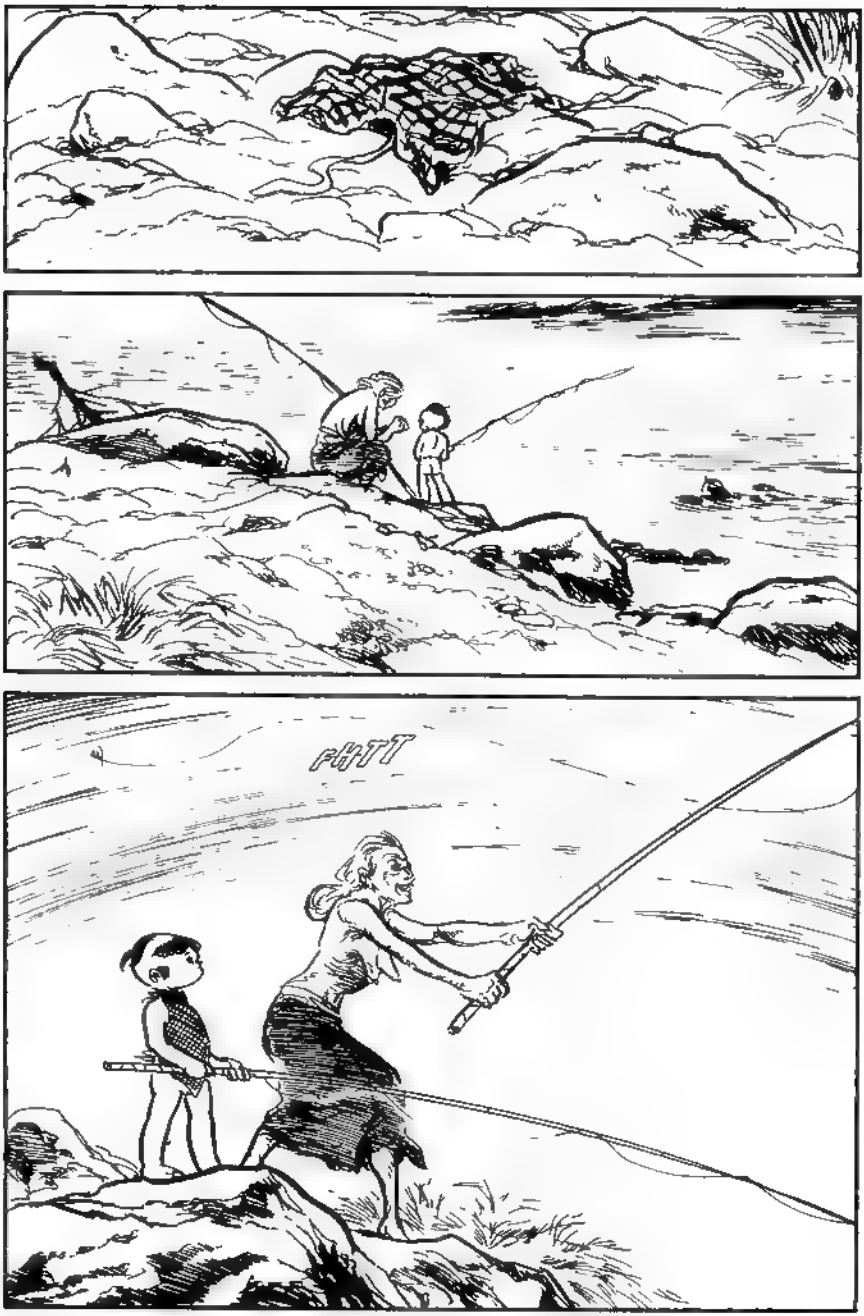
IF Y' COME DOWN WITH T'BRIDGE, THEM TIMBERS'LL SPEAR YOU!
Y'KIN HIT YER HAID ON A PILING! YOU'LL GIT HURT BAD!
KRNK
OI'' DAGNABBIT!
I SAID DON'T MOVE!
GRANNY'S COMIN' T'HELP, YE HEAR .?
BUT, BUT' IF'N I GIT UP THERE, WE'LL BOTH LORDY, WHAT T' DO?!

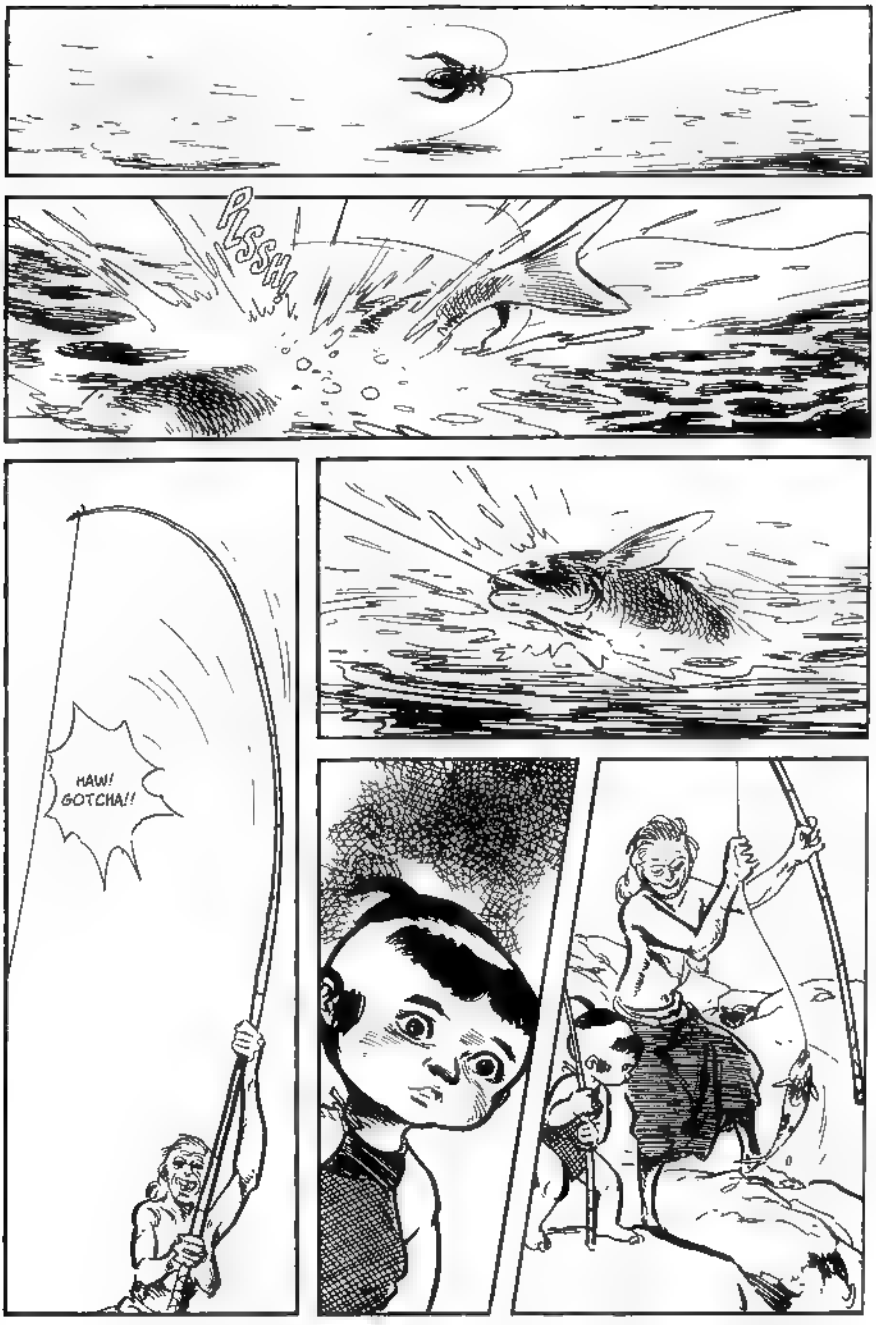
SKRAK
KRKK

KNCH
KRAK
AHH!


KBLOOSH
Al Al
Al!!


SQPF!
WHY, YER LI'L RASCAL!
JUMPIN' FROM WAY UP THERE...!
SGLPF!
SBLPPE
SPRSH
SPLSH
SPRSSH

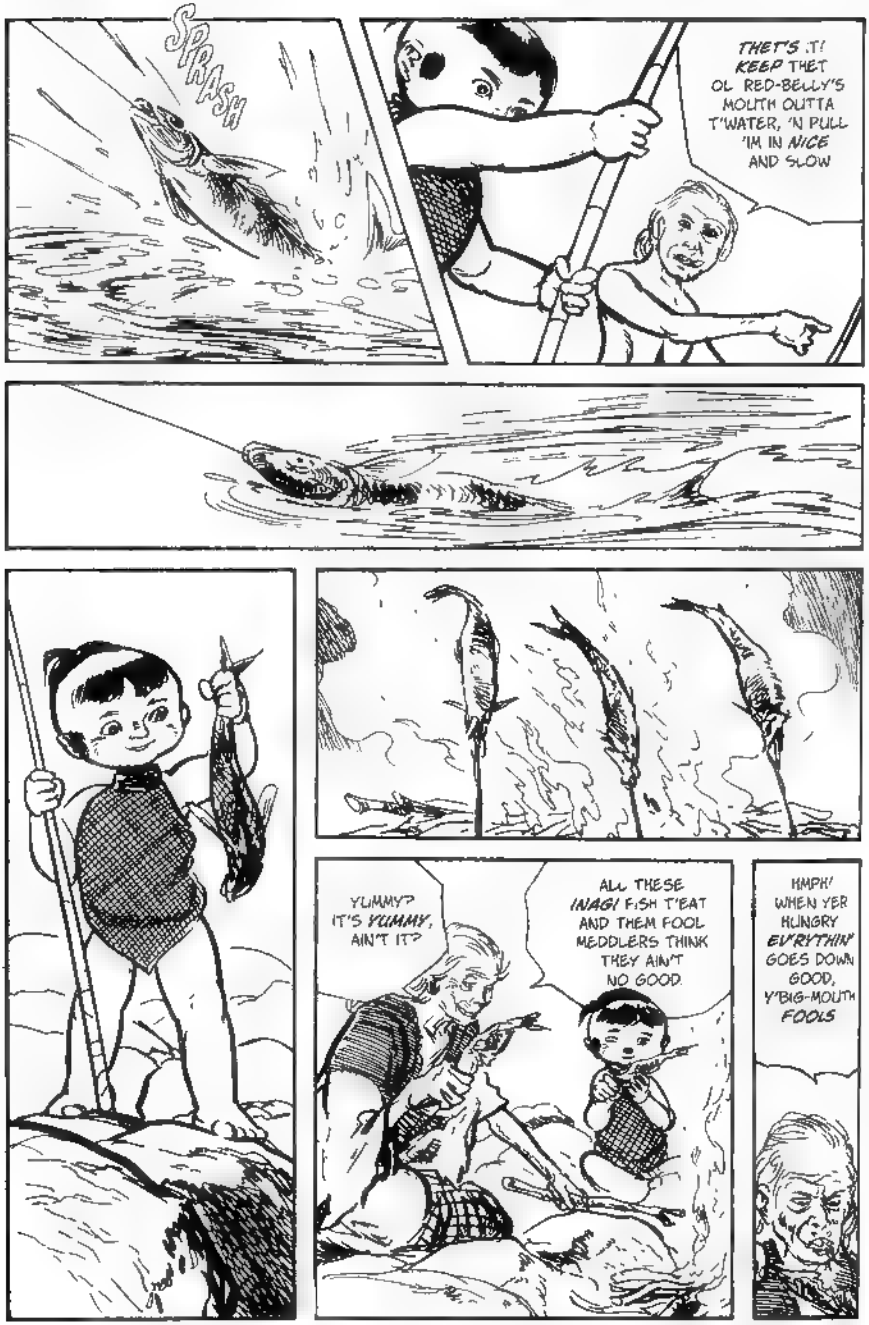

FHTT


PSSH!
HAW! GOTCHA!!

HEH, HEH. YER TURN, SWEETIE!
SEE THET? THEM INAGI FISH LIKE T'SMAK THET CRICKET WITH THEIR TAIL, 'N EAT IT UNDERWATER
SO WHEN Y'HEAR THAT SPLASH, COUNT "ONE, TWO, THREE" AFORE YE YANK
WHAT Y' EAT YERSELF, Y'GOTTA CATCH YERSELF EVEN A LI'L TYKE LIKE YOU!- THET'S T'WAY A' THIS WORLD
WHSSH

PLT
DON' CHUNK IT SO HARD! Y' GOTTA FLOAT IT OUT THERE! FLOAT IT!
FHTT
SPLSSH

'MEMBER! ONE'N TWO'N THREE, YANK!


SPRASH
THET'S IT! KEEP THET OL' RED-BELLY'S MOUTH OUTTA T'WATER, 'N PULL 'IM IN NICE AND SLOW
YUMMY? IT'S YUMMY, AIN'T IT?
ALL THESE INAGI FISH T'EAT AND THEM FOOL MEDDLERS THINK THEY AIN'T NO GOOD.
HMPH! WHEN YER HUNGRY EVRYTHIN' GOES DOWN GOOD, Y'BIG-MOUTH FOOLS

O-ROKU, MA'AM. .?
FAH!! SWEET TALK ME ALL Y'WANT WITH YER MA'AM'S AN' ALL! I AIN'T BUDGIN'!
WE'VE GOT TO REBUILD THE BRIDGE. ONE HIGH WATER, AND THE OLD THING WILL COME CRASHING DOWN.
AND YOU'LL BE CRUSHED UNDER IT, UNDERSTAND?
KIN'T PRAY FOR NOTHIN' BETTER DYIN' KIN'T COME FAST ENUF FER ME!
Y' UN-GRATEFUL OL' HAG!
IF'N A FLOOD TAKES TH' BRIDGE OUT, FOLK DOWN RIVER COULD GIT HURT BAD!
DON'TCHER CAREP!
HMPH! KAIN'T MY BUSINESS WHAT HAPPENS TO YOU FOLK!
WHY, YOU OLD-!!
WHOA, WHOA!
LOOK HERE, O-ROKU. WE'RE WORRIED FOR YOU. CAN'T YOU SEE THAT?
HMPH!

WHO'S THAT BOY?
GOT NO IDEAR!
HE'S NOT LOCAL. WHERE DID YOU FIND HIM?
AMBLED IN BY HISSELF, DIDN'T HE?
IF'N HE LAIKS IT, HE'LL STAY IF'N HE DON'T, HE'LL MOSEY OFF ..
HAIN'T NONE A' MAH BUSINESS WHO HE BE!
AH'M TRYIN' T'GIT SOME SLEEP!
AND YOU FOLK, HARRASSIN' AN OL' LADY!
I'M WARNING YOU! WE'RE MOVING YOU TO FIX THIS BRIDGE. BY FORCE, IF NECESSARY!
HMPH! JES' YOU TRY! I'LL HANG MYSELF OFF IT AND DIE ON YE! I'LL BE BACK EVERY NIGHT T'HAUNT YE!
U-RA-MF-SH-YARR. !!

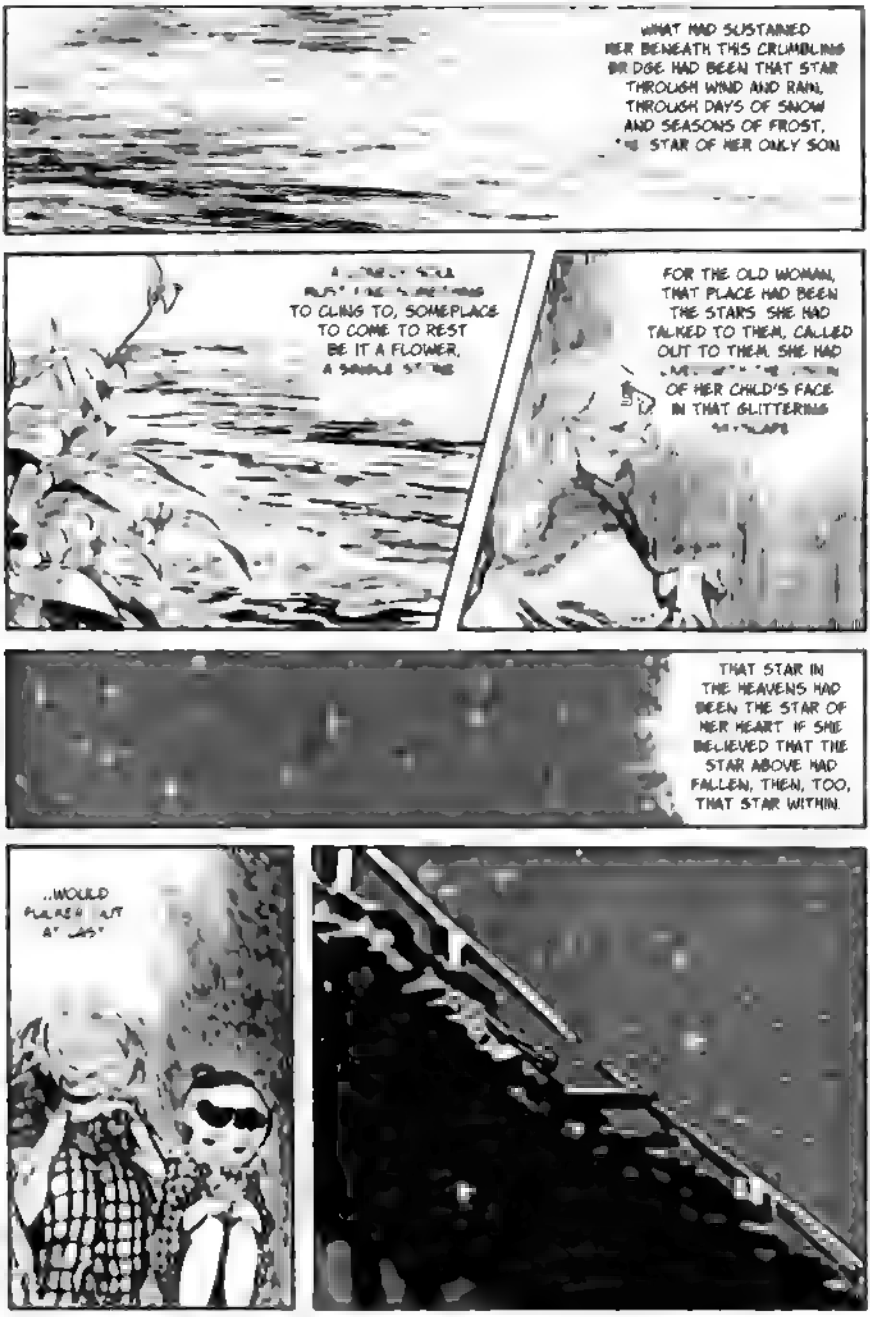
WE IS ALL BORN WITH OUR OWN STAR
WHICH BE YER'S, MM, SWEETIE?

IS IT THET THERE SHINIEST ONE OF ALL. ?
GRANNY'S STAR'S THET ONE. SO WEE 'N TINY SO FEEBLE N' AILIN', IT'S FIT TA FALL RIGHT OUTTA THE SKY
WHEN THET STAR FALLS, SO DO I WHEN YER LIFE RUNS OUT, YER STAR COMES SHOOTIN' DOWN.
I'M STICKIN' T' THIS BRIDGE FER A REASON.
MY MAN WAS THE BOATMASTER FER THIS STRETCH A'RIVER. WORKED HISSELF TO THE BONE FER THE VILLAGE!
WE WAS BOAT PEOPLE, DIDN' HAVE NO FIELDS SO WHENS THEY BUILT THET BRIDGE, WE COULDN' LIVE.
BUT DID THEM MEDDLERS CARE? WALKIN' 'ROUND ALL POKER-FACED! WHEN MY MAN BEGGED 'EM, KNOW WHAT THEY SAID? YE KIN HAVE THET MUD UN'ER THE BRIDGE! CHEW ON 'TATERS IF YE WANT.

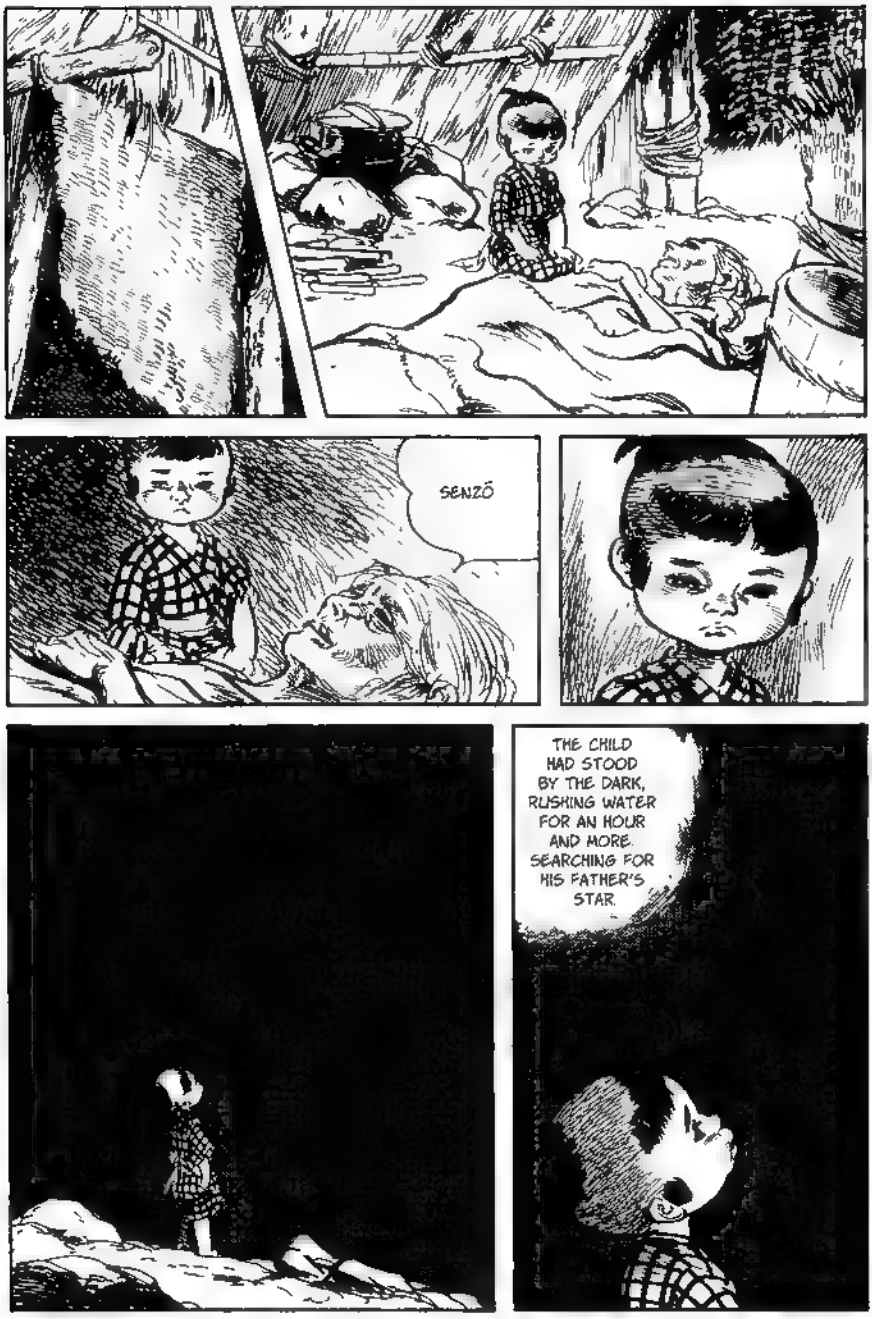
HNPH! WHAT KIN YE GROW HERBS?!
OUR FAMILY WENT T'PIECES, IT DID. MY MAN DIED YOUNG, MY POOR BOY SENZŌ JOINED THEM YAKUZA.
'N NOW THEY SAY MOVE?
HNPH!
THIS MUD'S OUR MUD! I HAIN'T BUDGIN!'
IF ONLY. IF ONLY
IF ONLY SENZŌ'D COME. COME HOME T'ME.
DAMNED IDJIT! WHERE'S 'E GOT HISSELF TO NOW..

THAT ONE'S SENZŌ'S STAR..
AHH?!
S-SENZŌ'S STAR!
SENZŌ'S STAR...!

S-SENZŌ...?
SOMETHING STRUNG TIGHT IN THE OLD WOMAN'S HEART HAD FINALLY SNAPPED.


WHAT HAD SUSTAINED HER BENEATH THIS CRUMBLING BRIDGE HAD BEEN THAT STAR THROUGH WIND AND RAIN, THROUGH DAYS OF SNOW AND SEASONS OF FROST, THE STAR OF HER ONLY SON
TO CLING TO, SOMEPLACE TO COME TO REST BE IT A FLOWER,
FOR THE OLD WOMAN, THAT PLACE HAD BEEN THE STARS SHE HAD TALKED TO THEM, CALLED OUT TO THEM. SHE HAD
OF HER CHILD'S FACE IN THAT GLITTERING
THAT STAR IN THE HEAVENS HAD BEEN THE STAR OF HER HEART IF SHE BELIEVED THAT THE STAR ABOVE HAD FALLEN, THEN, TOO, THAT STAR WITHIN.
..WOULD

IT'S COMIN' ON TO RAIN...
GOTTA DO SOMETHIN'!
BULL-HEADED OL' HAG!
WE OUGHTA JES' DRAG HER OUTTA THERE..

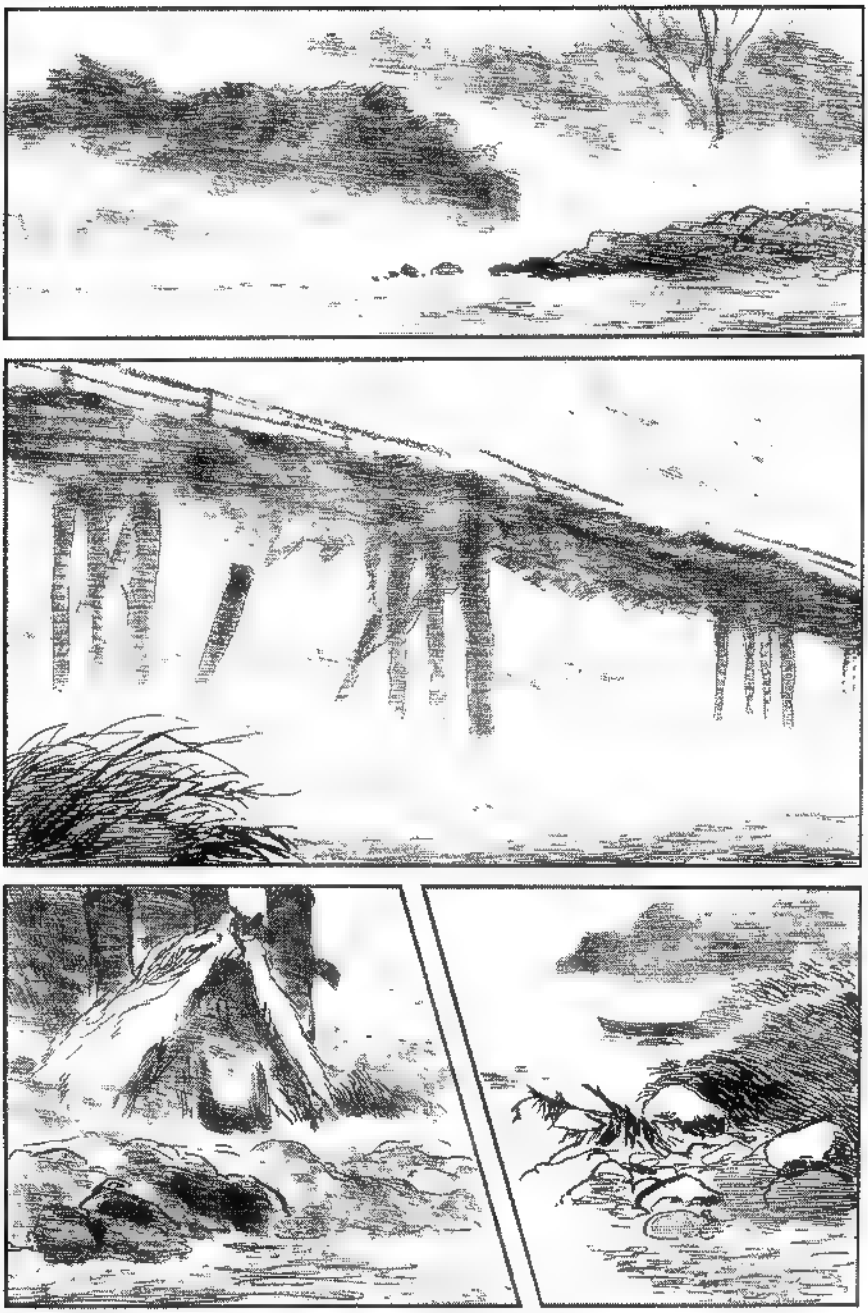

SENZŌ
THE CHILD HAD STOOD BY THE DARK, RUSHING WATER FOR AN HOUR AND MORE. SEARCHING FOR HIS FATHER'S STAR.

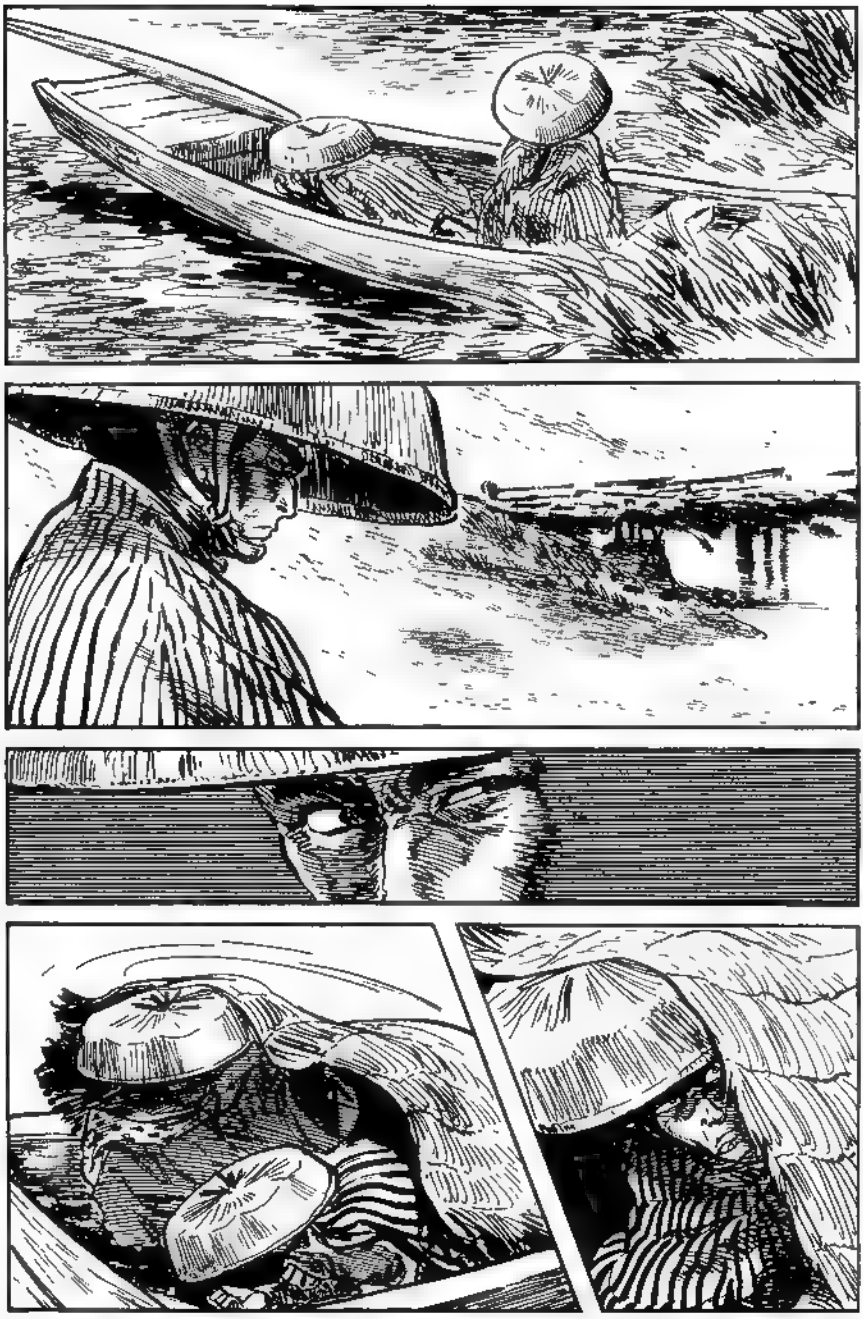
BUT TONIGHT THE STARS WERE HIDDEN. WHERE HAD THEY GONE, HE WONDERED?
UNTIL THE PREVIOUS DAY, HE HADN'T EVEN KNOWN WHAT THEY WERE CALLED
HEY, BOSS! GOOD THING WE FOUND THIS *FERRY BOAT*, HUH?!
MM.

WHOA! HEY!!
KLAK
CRAP! WHO'D'VE THOUGHT SCULLING A FRIGGIN' BOAT WOULD BE SO HARD! WE'RE GOING NOWHERE FAST!
MOVE OVER
KA-THUNK
HEH. YOU'RE GOOD BOSS. A NATURAL BOATMAN!

SKRSSH
BOSS. . WHAT'RE YOU DOING?!
WE'LL CAMP OUT HERE TONIGHT
HUH?! WHY DO WE GOTTA ROUGH IT?

PEOPLE'LL SEE US AT AN INN.
WE'RE GOING TO PUT A LOT OF ROAD BEHIND US BEFORE THIS DIES DOWN. YOU BETTER GET USED TO SLEEPING ON DIRT
YEAH. I GUESS YOU'RE RIGHT.





WE HAVE TO GET O-ROKU TO MOVE TODAY, NO MATTER WHAT
DON'T LIKE THE LOOK O' THEM CLOUDS, NO SIR IF'N THE RAIN SETTLES IN, IT'S ALL OVER
WE BEEN LUCKY IT HAIN'T FLOODED THESE TWO YEARS RUNNIN' BUT IT HAIN'T GONNA LAST
WE DONE GONE *EASY* ON 'ER, POOR OL' THING, E'EN IF SHE *IS* SO CUSSED *MEAN* BUT IT'S GOTTA STOP
SHE'S A DAMN *CURSE*! I SAY WE DRIVE 'ER OFF FER *GOOD*!

DON' YOU *WORRY* 'BOUT ME!
TAKE CARE A' YERSELF *BY* YERSELF
WE *LIVES* ALONE, WE *DIES* ALONE. DON'T *HELP* NOBODY, DON'T *COUNT* ON NOBODY IF YE KIN'T MAKE IT BY YERSELF Y' *DIE*

FOLKS WHAT COUNTS ON OTHERS *DESERVE* TO DROP DEAD! IT'S LAIK *DRAGGIN'* YER SOUL THROUGH THE *MUD*.
EVEN *YOU*, SWEETIE... JES' CUZ YER LI'L, DON'T YE GO BEGGIN' LIVE BY YERSELF IF YE CAN'T, *DIE*
NOW *SKEDDADLE* OFF TO WHEREVER YER GOIN'
BACK AG'IN?! DURN MEDDLERS!!
THD
SKRNCH

NEVER!
I HAIN'T GOIN'!
I DON'T CARE WHAT YE SAY! I AIN'T NEVER LEAVIN'!
O-ROKU, PLEASE!
WE'RE ONLY THINKING OF YOU!
IF TH' BRIDGE COMES DOWN, YOU'LL GIT SQUISHED, DANG IT!
I TOLD YE I'M READY TO DIE! I'D BE HAPPIER DEAD!

AIN'T NOBODY TO WASH THESE BONES WHEN I DIE! I BEEN WAITIN' FER TH' REAPER TO TAKE ME TO HELL, DAY IN 'N DAY OUT!
CRAZY OLD NAG!
HMPH! DURN MEDDLERS!
MY FAMILY WAS RUINED ON ACCOUNT O' YE!
'N NOW YE COME FIBBIN' ABOUT HOW MUCH YE CARE!
WHADJA SAY WHEN YE BUILT THET BRIDGE?!
"CAN'T LOOK AFTER YOU," THET'S WHAT! "TAKE THET MUD BY T'RIVER! GNAW ON 'TATERS IF YE DON'T WANTA LEAVE!"
YE CUT ME DEAD FOR TEN YEARS STRAIGHT! AN' NOW YER COME CRAWLIN'!
DANG IT! WE'LL DRAG YE OFF IN CHAINS!
HOH! THET'S MORE LAIK IT! JES' YOU TRY!

VERY WELL! WE HAVE NO CHOICE. SEIZE HER!
LAY A FINGER ON ME AND I'LL KILL MESELF! I'LL HAUNT YE!
I'LL CURSE YER BR DGE FROM BEYOND TH' GRAVE!
DROP IT, O-ROKU, PLEASE!
CAN'T YOU UNDERSTAND?! IT'S FOR THE VILLAGE, AND FOR YOU!
H-HEY?!

AH..!!
NO!!
NOT AGIN!?!

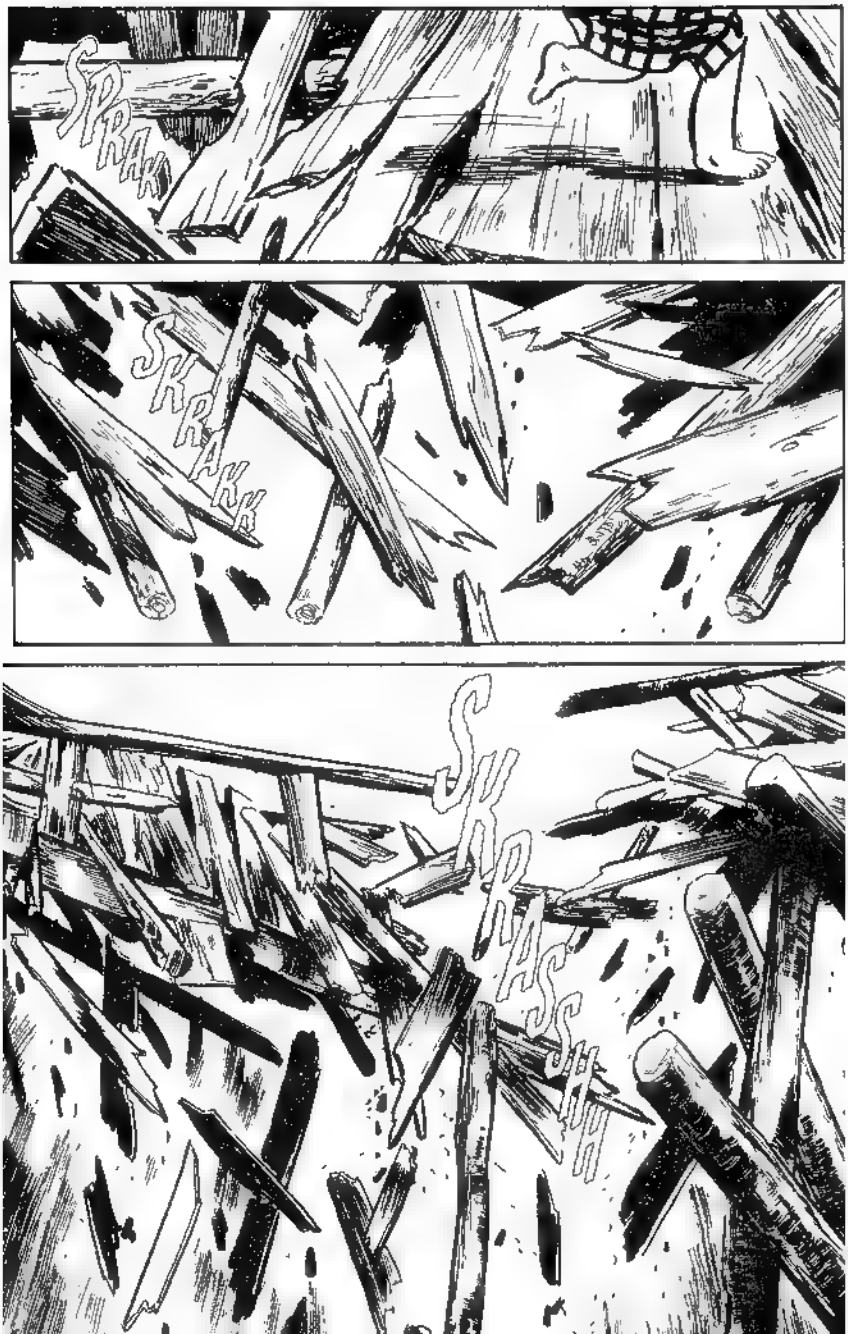
Y' LI'L IDJIT!! AFTER ALL I TOLD YE!
KRAK
SNAK

C-COME 'ERE! RIGHT NOW!
SLOW... SLOW. JES' EDGE ON OVER...
aah!
D-DON'T TELL ME...?!
IS...IS THET IT, SWEETIE...?
Y' THOUGHT IF Y' WENT ON THE BRIDGE, THEM MEDDLERS'D IS THET IT...?
FER.. FER ME? Y' WENT OUT THERE FER ME?

I'M SORRY, SWEETIE. I BEEN BAD.
I BEEN TOO MEAN...
NOW PLEASE...? IT'S OKAY NOW. COME BACK?
DON'T Y' WORRY, SWEETIE. I'LL BE GOOD JES' GIT ON BACK.

AHHH!!
MOM

KRK
KRAK
KRAK


SPRAK
SKRAKK
SKRASSH

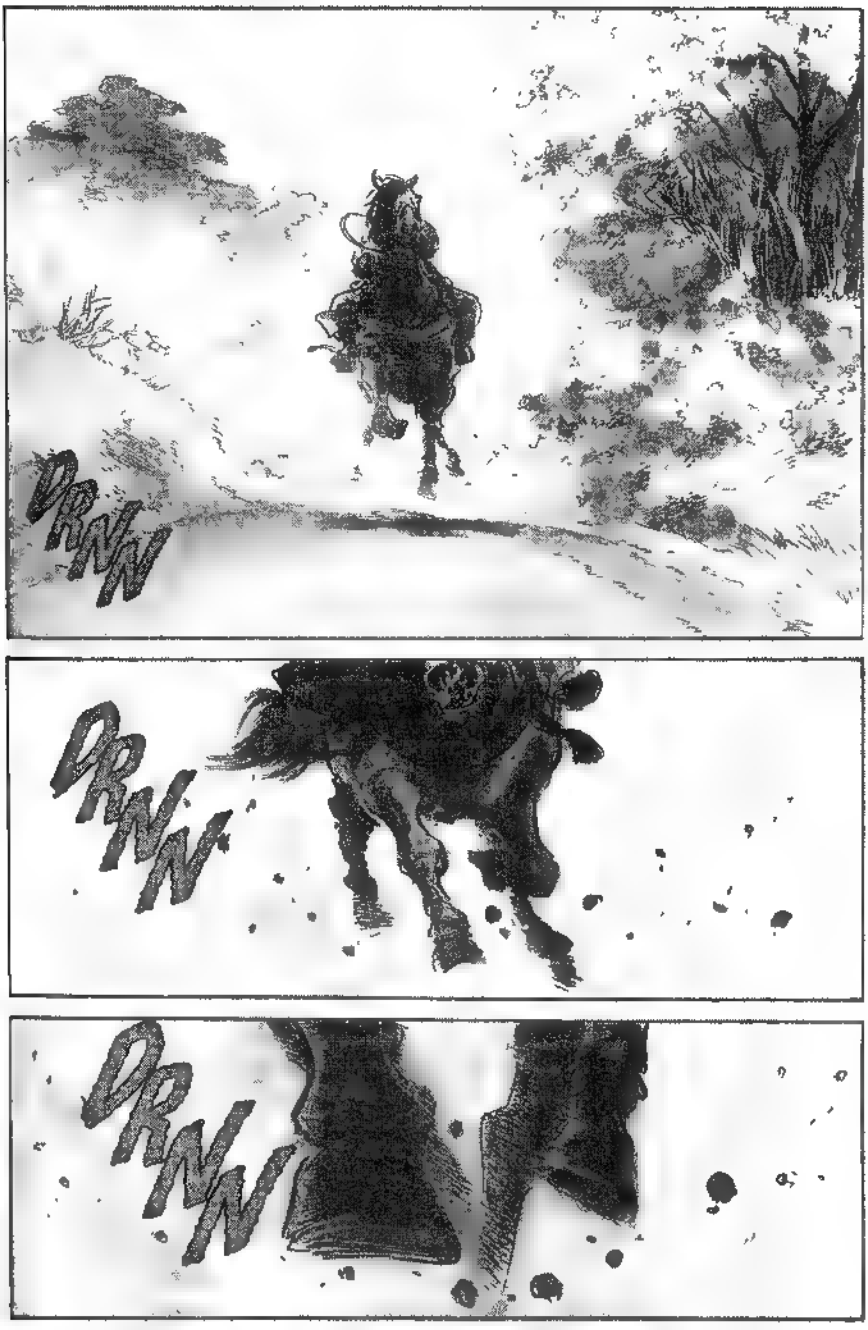
KRASHOOM
SKBLOOSH

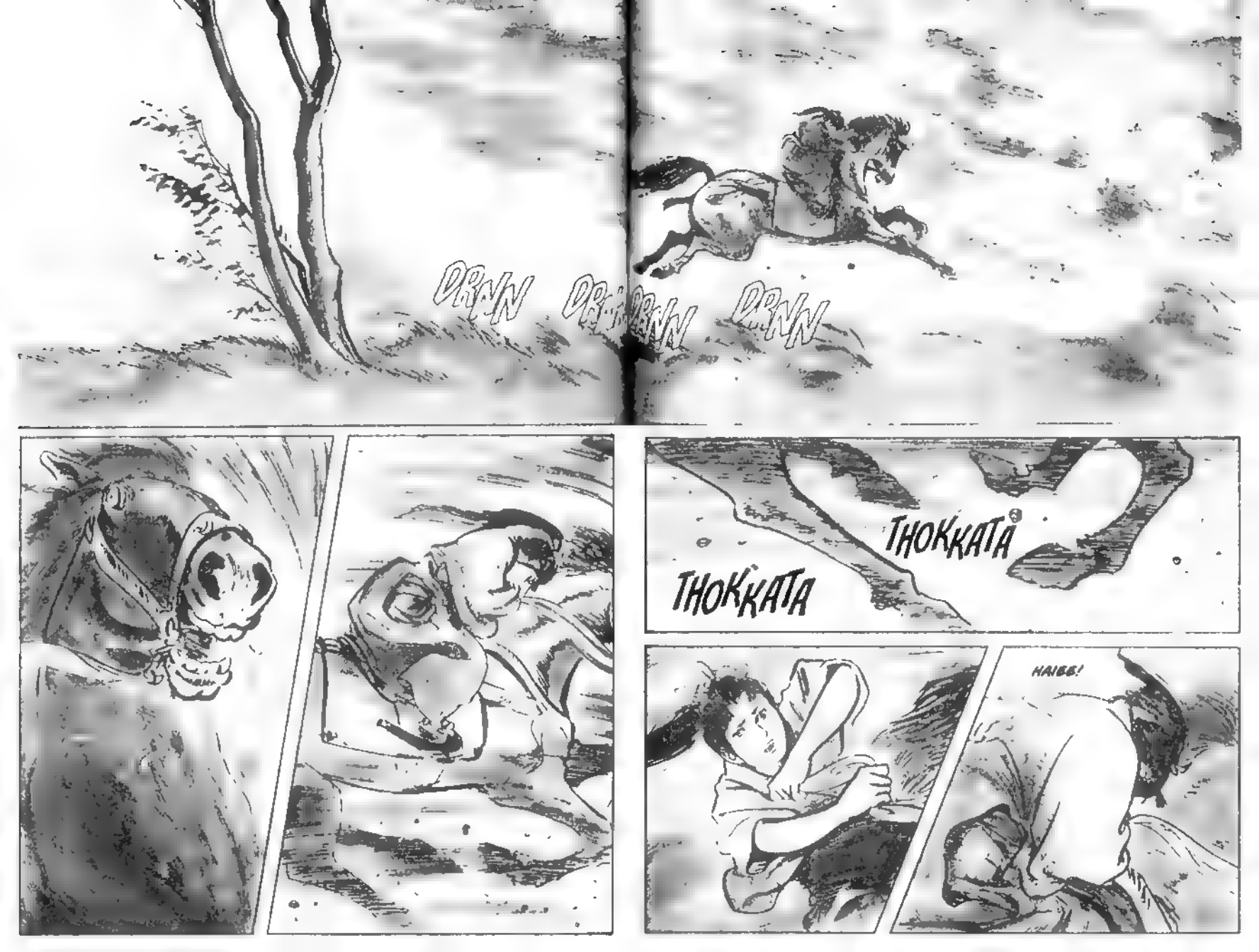
AHH...!!
S-SWEETIE...?
O-ROKU. MA'AM. WE'VE DONE YOU WRONG.
....
....

B-BOSS ? WHERE YA GOING. ?
BACK I'M TURNING MYSELF IN.
WH- WHAT?!

the fifty-seventh

Thirteen Strings


DRNN
DRNN
DRNN


DRNN
DRNN
DRNN
THOKKATA
THOKKATA
HAIEE!

DRN
DRN
DRNN
DRNN
DRNN

EEK!
EEEE!!
UMPH!

AK!!!
MAMA!!
OHH!
UNG.

THOKKATA
THOKKATA

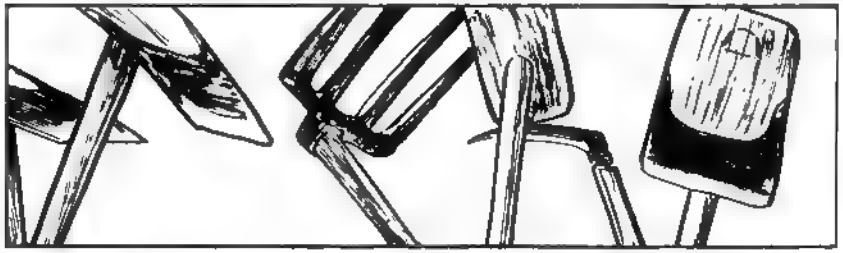
WHOA!
HOLD!
AHH..?!
K-KANAE-SAMA!
CUR! IDENTIFY YOURSELF!
IS THIS YOUR DOING?!

THIS IS THE LADY KANAE, DAUGHTER OF THE GO-JŌDAI OF ODAWARA HAN!
S-SCUM!! HOW DARE YOU CAST YOUR SWORD AT ME!
I DIDN'T THROW IT AT YOU! I THREW IT STOP YOUR RUNAWAY HORSE.
THERE WAS NO OTHER WAY
TALK BACK, WILL YOU?!
YOU'RE AFTER MY LIFE, I KNOW IT! WE'LL ARREST YOU AND MAKE YOU CONFESS!
HAVE YOU FORGOTTEN THE CHILD YOU NEARLY CRUSHED BENEATH YOUR HOOVES? STOP HIDING YOUR POOR HORSEMANSHIP BEHIND SPURIOUS CHARGES!
SILENCE! KILL HIM!
CUT THAT INTRUDER DOWN!

HE TRIED TO MURDER ME! KILL HIM!
KILL HIM!
KANG
KANG

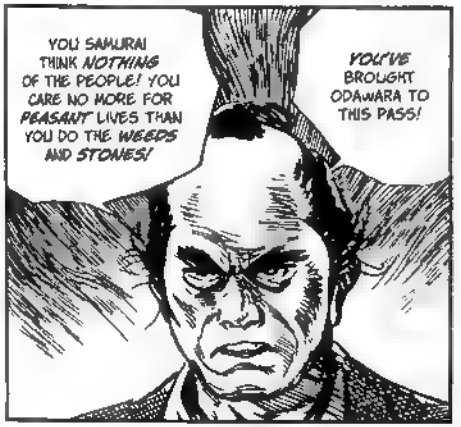
HNGG
KRHNG

URK!
ULP..!
AHH?!



O-OGORI CHOSUKE...
DAMN!

THE GUILTY PARTIES ARE KANAE-SAMA AND ALL OF YOU! THIS MAN SAVED A CHILD'S LIFE, AND RESCUED YOUR LADY FROM A RUNAWAY HORSE!
YOU SHOULD THANK HIM, AND INSTEAD YOU CRY OUT TO KILL? ABSURD!


YOU SAMURAI THINK NOTHING OF THE PEOPLE! YOU CARE NO MORE FOR PEASANT LIVES THAN YOU DO THE WEEDS AND STONES!
YOU'VE BROUGHT ODAWARA TO THIS PASS!

YOU SH-SHUT UP!!
HOW DARE AN OVERBLOWN PEASANT INSULT THE JODAI'S DAUGHTER! I'LL SEE YOU PAY FOR THIS!

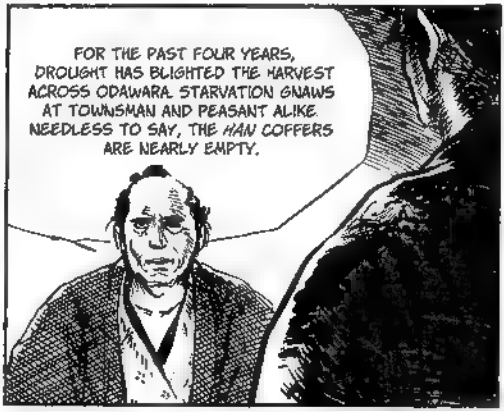
SILENCE!
WE'LL FORGIVE THIS OUTRAGE BECAUSE OF OUR MEETING WITH THE GO-JŌDAI-SAMA TOMORROW MORNING. BUT IF THOSE TALKS FAIL, YOU ALL DIE.
YOU CAN'T TALK TO ME LIKE THAT!
KANAE-SAMA, NO!
UNHAND ME!
K-KANAE-SAMA, THIS ISN'T THE TIME.
LET ME GO!!
HOW CAN BUSHI SHOW THEIR BACKS TO PEASANTS?!
B-BUT KANAE-SAMA.
I WON'T FORGET THIS!!

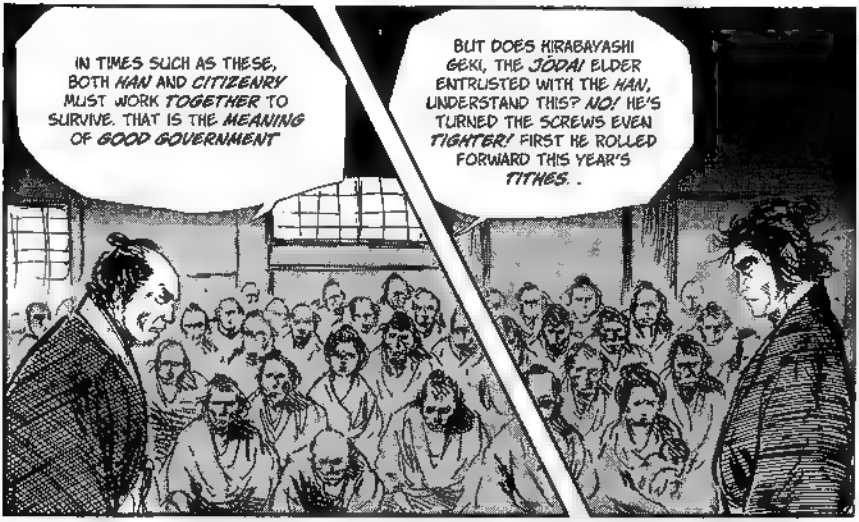
TH-THANK YOU, KIND SIR.
TRULY, WE ARE IN YOUR DEBT
WOULD YOU JOIN US IN A SMALL REPAST AS A TOKEN OF OUR GRATITUDE?
UNNECESSARY
O-SAMURAI-SAMA. IT WILL TAKE YOU A DAY AND A NIGHT TO CROSS ODAWARA HAN.
AND YOU SHALL FIND NOTHING ALONG THE WAY NO RICE, SIR, NO BARLEY NOT EVEN MILLET AND BARNYARD GRASSES. THE VERY STEMS OF THE POTATOES ARE GONE.
AND SO, SIR, A MERE MOUTHFUL, IN THANKS.
I CAN GO A DAY WITHOUT FOOD.
ALL THE MORE SO, KNOWING HOW YOU SUFFER..
SIR! I BEG YOU!
STOP HERE AWHILE!

I AM OGORI CHŌSUKE, *SŌMEISHU* OF THE FORTY-SIX VILLAGES OF ODAWARA!
FROM YOUR BEARING AND COMPOSURE I CAN SEE YOU ARE AN EXCEPTIONAL MAN.
AND THUS I BEG YOU. *PAUSE* HERE, AND CONSIDER A HUMBLE *REQUEST*
WHAT MATTER CAN BE SO WEIGHTY THAT A *SŌMEISHU* WITH HIS OWN SWORD AND FAMILY NAME WOULD TOUCH HIS FOREHEAD TO THE EARTH..?
DEATH, SIR IMPENDING *DEATH*, FOR THE *FORTY-SIX VILLAGES* AND *SEVENTY-EIGHT HUNDRED* CITIZENS OF ODAWARA!

WE HAVE LITTLE TO OFFER BUT PLEASE, PARTAKE

TELL ME ALL.


FOR THE PAST FOUR YEARS, DROUGHT HAS BLIGHTED THE HARVEST ACROSS ODAWARA. STARVATION GNAWS AT TOWNSMAN AND PEASANT ALIKE. NEEDLESS TO SAY, THE *HAN* COFFERS ARE NEARLY EMPTY.


IN TIMES SUCH AS THESE, BOTH *HAN* AND *CITIZENRY* MUST WORK *TOGETHER* TO SURVIVE. THAT IS THE *MEANING* OF *GOOD GOVERNMENT*
BUT DOES KIRABAYASHI GEKI, THE *JŌDAI* ELDER ENTRUSTED WITH THE *HAN*, UNDERSTAND THIS? *NO!* HE'S TURNED THE SCREWS EVEN *TIGHTER!* FIRST HE ROLLED FORWARD THIS YEAR'S *TITHES*. .

...INSTITUTED SPOT INSPECTIONS, RAISED TAXES TWENTY-SEVEN PERCENT ..AND NOW THEY TALK OF SEIZING US ALL FOR FORCED LABOR! WE'VE BEEN PUSHED TO THE BRINK OF DEATH
AS THINGS STAND NOW, WE HAVE BUT TWO CHOICES. PRESENT A KAGO-SHO TO THE GO-RŌJŪ IN EDO, OR RISE UP IN REVOLT AND TOPPLE THE GO-JŌDAI.
PERHAPS THE GO-JŌDAI CAUGHT WIND OF OUR PLANS AND FINALLY REALIZED HOW DESPERATE WE ARE.
.. FOR NOW HE HAS ASKED FOR A PARLEY AT THE CASTLE.
'N WE SAYS IT'S A TRAP!
THEY'RE JES' CALLIN' IT A "PARLEY" TO GIT AT OUR SŌMEISHI! THEY'LL CLAP 'IM IN IRONS, OR KILL HIM ON TH' SPOT!
OF COURSE, I AM PREPARED FOR DEATH YET I CANNOT DIE WITHOUT ENDING THIS CRISIS!
THEY'RE A RAGTAG ARMY OF PEASANTS, UNTRAINED IN WAR. THE CASTLE SAMURAI WILL DESTROY THEM.

BUT IF ANYTHIN' HAPPENS TO THE SŌMEISHU, WE'RE LOST, WE SURELY ARE!
AND YET, WE CAN'T REFUSE THIS CHANCE! IF THE GO-JŌDAI IS TRULY CONCERNED FOR THE WELFARE OF THE HAN, THEN A NEGOTIATED SETTLEMENT IS BEST OF ALL. NO ONE WANTS BLOODSHED.

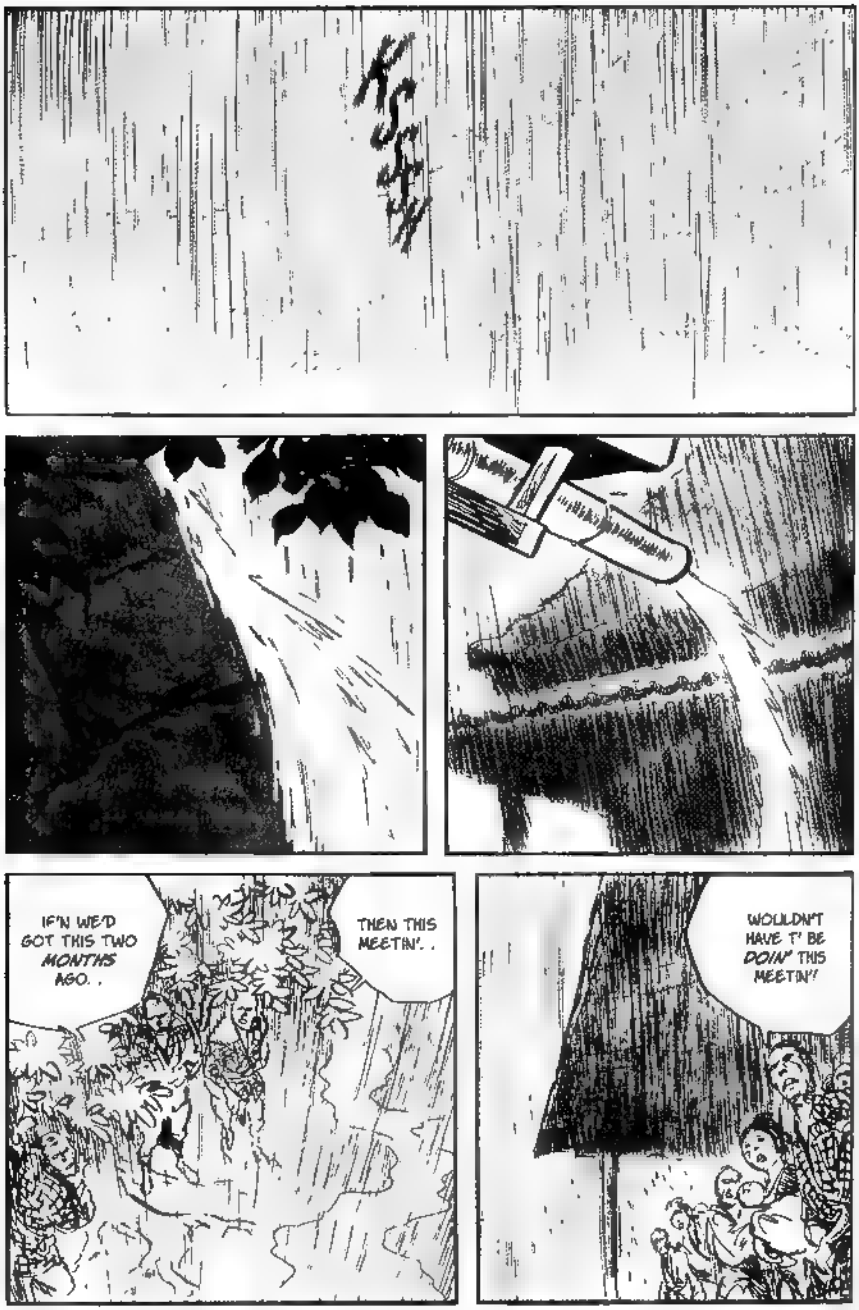
WHAT WOULD YOU ASK OF *ME* ?
ACCOMPANY ME *OBSERVE* THE MEETING
IF ANYTHING SHOULD HAPPEN TO ME, *YOU* OF ALL MEN COULD FIGHT YOUR WAY TO FREEDOM. I WANT YOU TO TELL THE PEOPLE *EVERYTHING* THAT HAPPENS.

SCAT, YOU! THIS AIN'T NO PLACE FER YOUNG'NS!

YES, IT IS *TRULY* A SELFISH REQUEST
I CANNOT EXPECT A PASSING STRANGER TO ACCEPT SUCH A BURDEN. YET WE MUST GRASP AT EVERY STRAW...
IT WOULD BE ONLY NATURAL FOR YOU TO REFUSE.
I AM *ŌGAMI ITTŌ*. KNOWN TO SOME AS *LONE WOLF AND CUB*. MY BUSINESS. *ASSASSINATION*.
FOR EACH JOB, *FIVE HUNDRED RYŌ!*

WE. WE HAVE NO MONEY
EACH GRAIN OF THIS RICE WAS PAID FOR WITH BLOOD
A RYŌ IN VALUE, AT LEAST
I SHALL EAT ONE GRAIN, ONE RYŌ

THEN.
THEN
YOU...?!


IF'N WE'D GOT THIS TWO MONTHS AGO. .
THEN THIS MEETIN'. .
WOULDN'T HAVE T' BE DOIN' THIS MEETIN'!

YES, IF ONLY

KSSSSH
KSSSSH
THIS RAIN
IF ONLY IT HAD COME TWO MONTHS SOONER

AGAINST GOD, THE POWER OF MAN IS A PITIFUL THING
BUMPER HARVESTS. DESPERATE FAMINE. ALL IN THE HANDS OF HEAVEN. WHO CAN DEFY THE WHIM OF NATURE?
AND YET WE MUST SURVIVE! USE NATURE AS BEST WE CAN. DO WHATEVER WE CAN TO CONTAIN THE DAMAGE
THAT'S WHY WE NEED DAMS AND AN IRRIGATION SYSTEM TO STABILIZE OUR HARVESTS! THAT'S WHY WE NEED TO SWITCH FROM RICE TO POTATOES AND OTHER HIGH-YIELD CROPS.
YES, THE PEASANTS ARE ON THE BRINK OF STARVATION. DRIVEN TO DEATH'S DOOR
BUT SUSPENDING THEIR TITHES WILL ONLY BRING TEMPORARY RELIEF. ANOTHER YEAR OF DROUGHT AND THE FAMINE RETURNS WORSE THAN EVER!

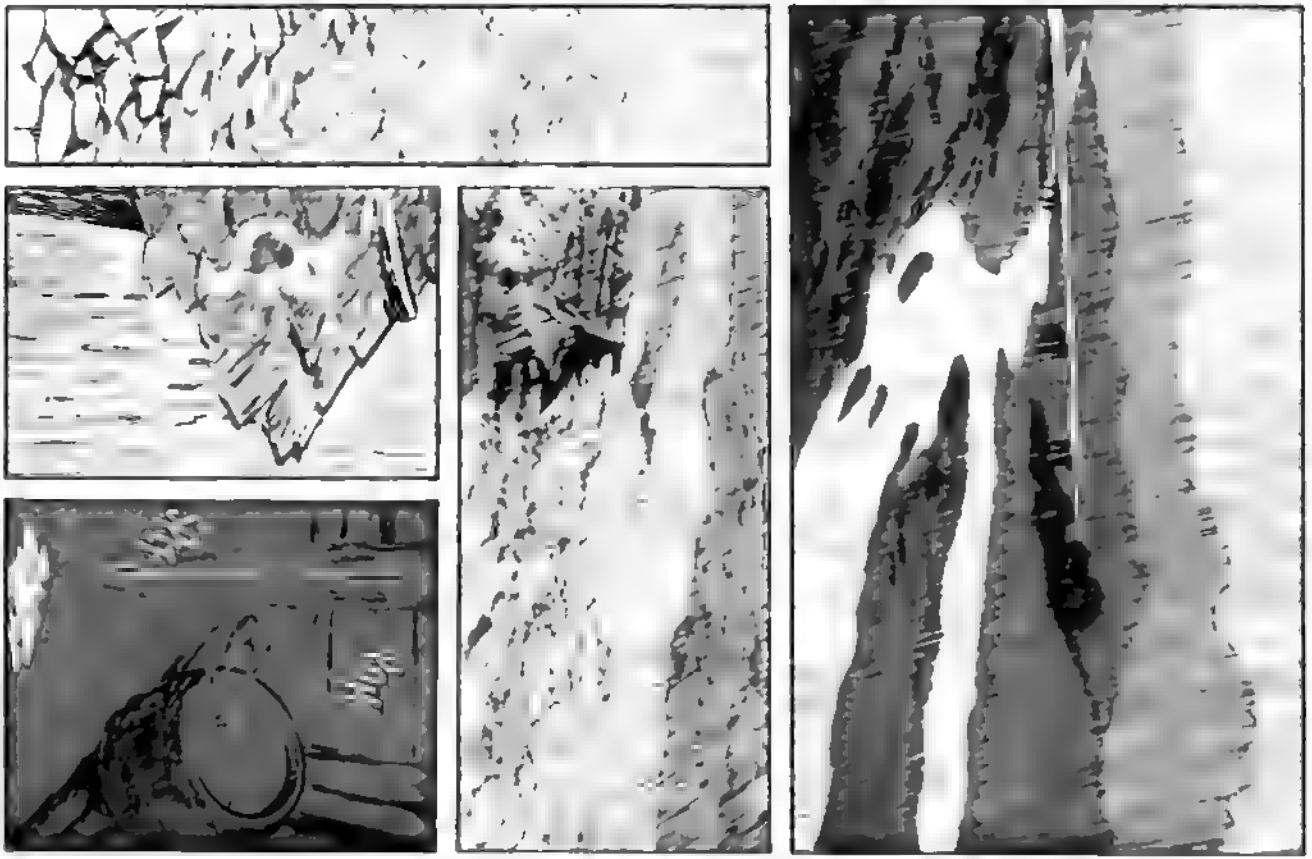
BOTH WE AND THE CITIZENRY WILL WEAKEN, UNTIL ALL IS LOST.
THE PEASANTS SAY WAIT, THE SHORT-SIGHTED FOOLS! "WAIT UNTIL A BUMPER HARVEST! WHY NOW, AT THE HEIGHT OF THE FAMINE?!"
BUT IS THERE ANY GUARANTEE WE'LL HAVE A BETTER HARVEST NEXT YEAR? IT'S BECAUSE THIS DROUGHT HAS LASTED SO LONG THAT WE HAVE TO ACT NOW FOR A BETTER FUTURE, EVEN IF WE SUFFER THE AGONIES OF HELL TODAY! WE MUST TRANSFORM OUR AGRICULTURE!
THE PEASANTS CAN'T SEE IT HOW COULD THEY? THEY'RE STRUGGLING EACH DAY TO GET BY AND YET
. I WILL CONVINCE THEM! I'LL BRING THEM AROUND, BY FORCE IF NECESSARY!
APPARENTLY YOU FOOLS DON'T UNDERSTAND EITHER!

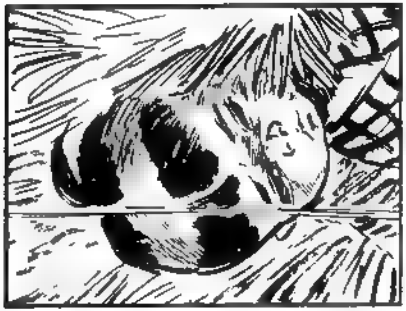
I'VE ARRANGED THIS MEETING WITH OGORI CHŌSUKE TO CONVINCE HIM!
TOMORROW THE FUTURE HANGS IN BALANCE WE HAVE TO AVOID ALL CONFLICT WITH THE PEASANTS BEFORE THESE TALKS.
AND YOU GO RUN YOUR DAMN HORSES, AND SET THE ENTIRE COUNTRYSIDE ON EDGE!
YOU INFERNAL FOOLS!
I'LL GIVE KANAE A TONGUE-LASHING SHE'LL NEVER FORGET! BUT WHAT WERE YOU IDIOTS THINKING?!
S-SIR!
WE HAVE NO EXCUSE...

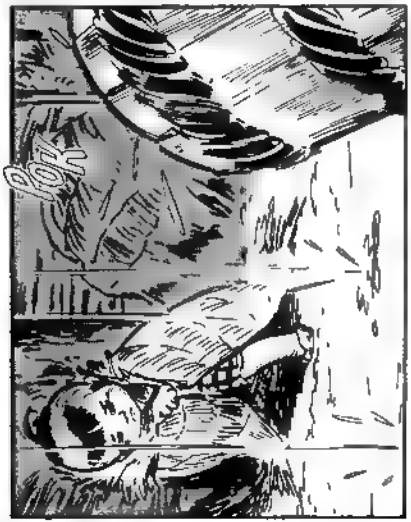
OWW!
THAT FOUL RŌNIN! I'LL TEACH HIM A LESSON!
KANAE!! I'VE HAD T UP TO HERE WITH YOUR WILD WAYS!

WHY DON'T YOU PRACTICE YOUR KOTO LIKE A PROPER YOUNG WOMAN?!
HMPH! I HAVE NO INTEREST IN SUCH FRIVOLOUS ARTS!
MASTERING SWORD AND SPEAR, PRACTICING HORSEMANSHIP FOR TIMES OF CRISIS!
THAT'S THE DUTY OF A SAMURAI WOMAN!
NONSENSE! KNOW YOUR STATION, CHILD! SO WHAT IF YOU CAN RIDE AND WAVE A SWORD? WHAT GOOD IS A WOMAN ON THE BATTLE-FIELD?!
IF DUTY CALLS, YOU SEND YOUR HUSBAND TO BATTLE WITH NO REGRETS! YOU DEFEND THE HEARTH AND HOME! THAT IS THE TRUE DUTY OF A SAMURAI WOMAN!
USE OF THE MARTIAL ARTS IS FOR MEN! WOMEN MASTER THE SKILLS MERELY TO SUPPORT THEIR HUSBANDS!

THEN YOU SAY IT'S *WRONG* FOR A WOMAN TO LIVE BY *BUSHIDŌ*?!
YOU SAY A WOMAN *SHOULDN'T* BE ABLE TO TAKE UP THE SWORD AND *FIGHT* IF HER HUSBAND DIES?
DON'T YOU *DARE* SPEAK TO ME OF *SHIDŌ*! *SHIDŌ* MEANS SELFLESS SERVICE, LIVING ALWAYS WITH *DEATH* IN YOUR *HEART*!
OF *COURSE* A *SAMURAI* WOMAN SHARES THAT SPIRIT BUT *SHIDŌ* ISN'T ABOUT MARTIAL ARTS. IF SHE HAS THE *SPIRIT*, THAT'S *ENOUGH*!
THEN, THEN YOU SAY-
ENOUGH! HOW *DARE* YOU TALK BACK TO *ME*?! FROM THIS DAY FORWARD, I *FORBID* YOU TO LEAVE YOUR QUARTERS!
NOT *ONE STEP* BEYOND THEM, *UNDERSTAND*?!
LEAVE ME ALONE!!



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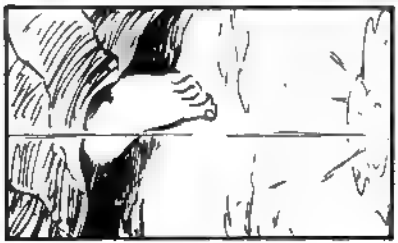
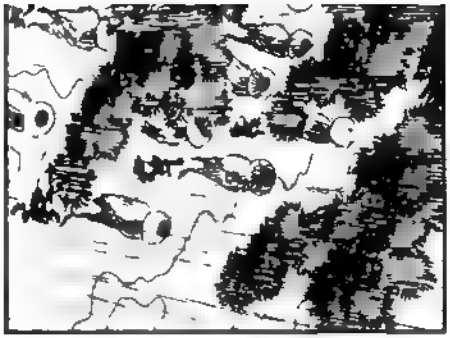
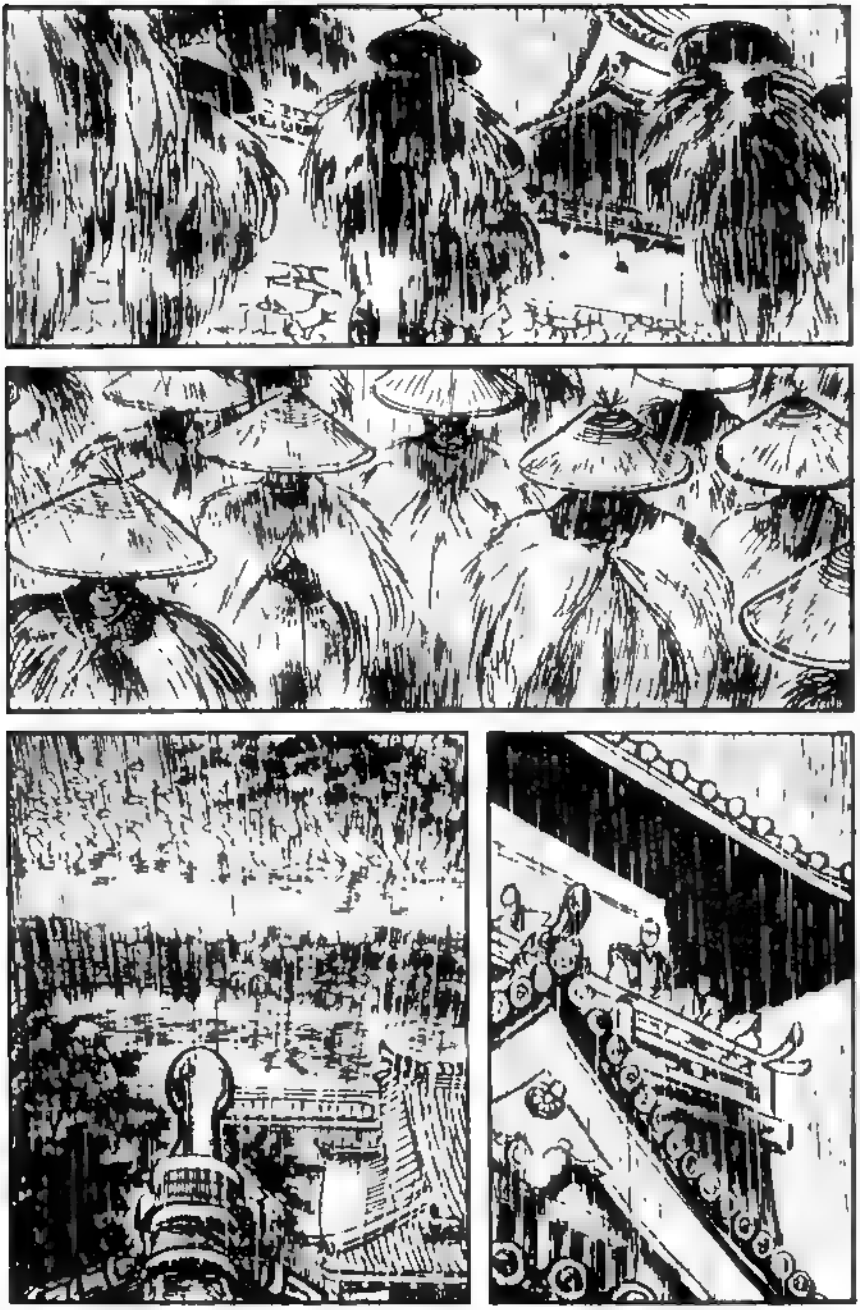
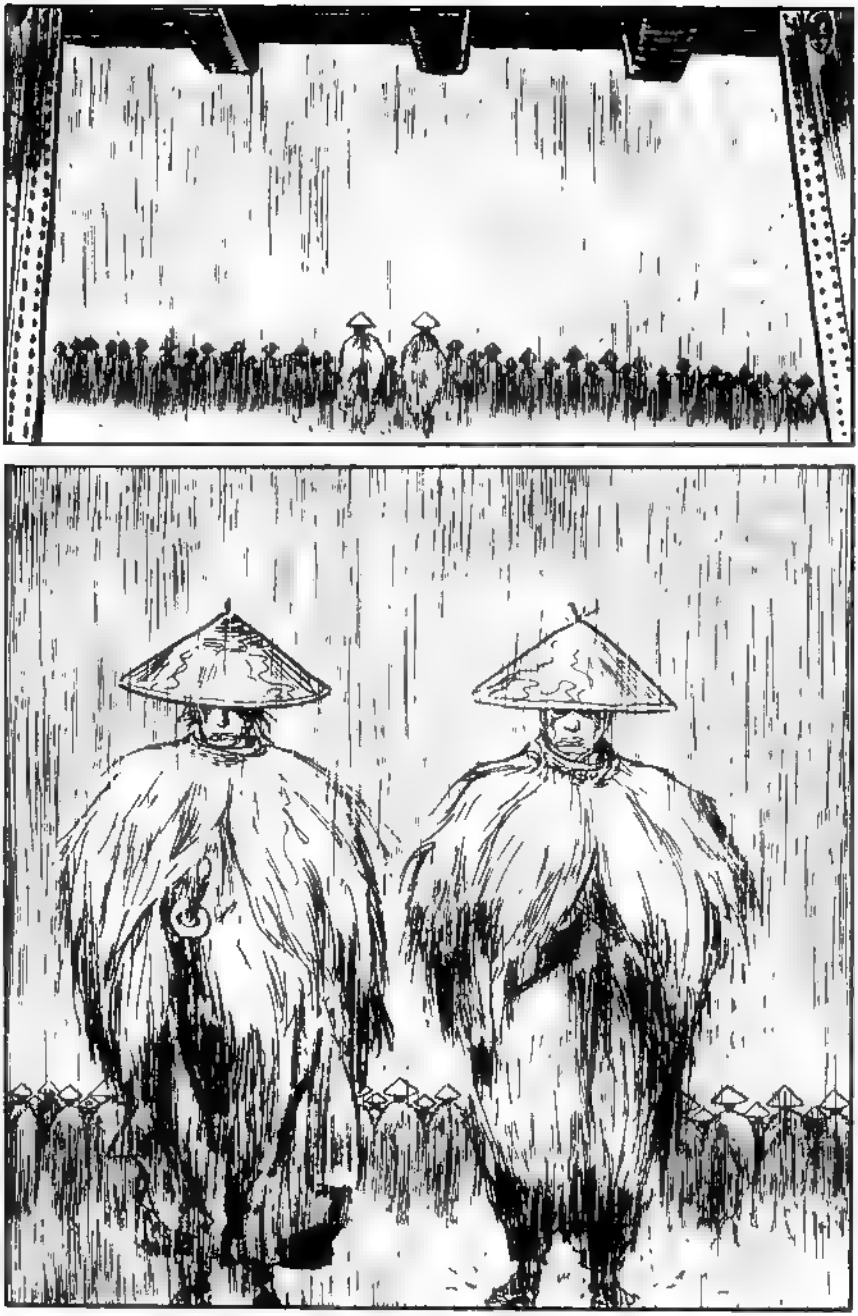


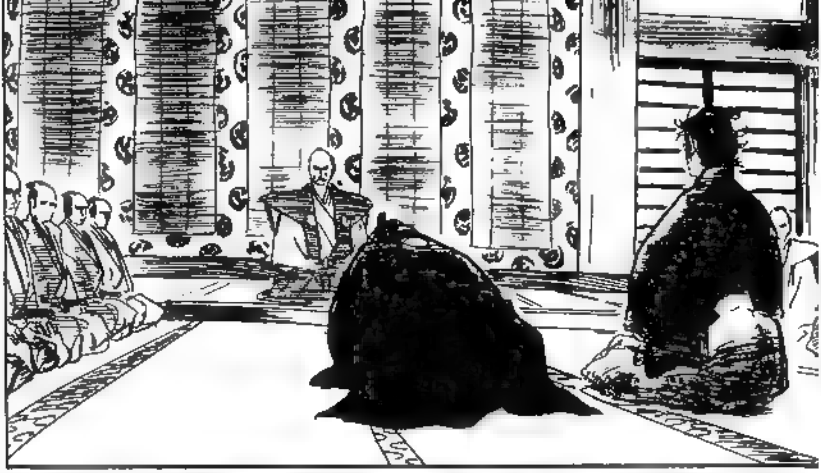


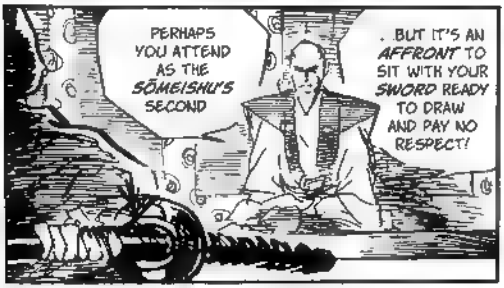


SO, OGORI CHŌSUKE YOU'VE CALLED OUT THE PEASANTS. FLEX YOUR MUSCLE BEFORE WE MEET, WILL YOU? I DON'T LIKE IT!
FIFTEEN HUNDRED AT LEAST, SIR.
YEAH, BUT THEY'RE A FLOCK OF BIRDS. CUT UP FIFTY OR SO, AND THEY'LL BREAK AND RUN.
I PRAY IT WON'T COME TO THAT YET. IF OGORI RESISTS, WE MAY HAVE NO CHOICE.
PREPARE FOR THE WORST. DEPLOY A TROOP OF YOUR BEST MEN.
SIR!



WHO'S THAT MAN WITH OGORI ?
IT LOOKS LIKE A RŌNIN, SIR
SO! YOU'VE HIRED A STARVING WOLF FOR YOUR PROTECTION, TOO?! I LIKE THIS LESS AND LESS! A PEASANT SHOULD MEET THE CASTLE WARDEN WITH DUE RESPECT IF YOU'RE COUNTING ON NUMBERS AND THE SWORD FROM THE START.
HOW SHALL WE HANDLE HIM, SIR?
HONOR AND TRADITION ALLOW OGORI A SECOND IGNORE THE MAN!
BUT, SIR! TO LET SOME NAMELESS RŌNIN INTO THE CASTLE. WITH A SWORD AT HIS SIDE. .
I DON'T CARE! WE CAN'T BE FLUSTERED BY THE FANGS OF ONE WILD DOG.
I MUST CONVINCE OGORI OF OUR COURSE. THAT COMES FIRST!



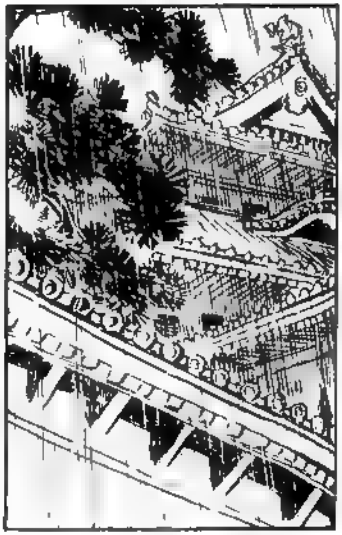

PERHAPS YOU ATTEND AS THE SŌMEISHU'S SECOND
. BUT IT'S AN AFFRONT TO SIT WITH YOUR SWORD READY TO DRAW AND PAY NO RESPECT!

MY APOLOGIES
BUT OBSERVE, SIR
THIS IS A DŌTAMARU BATTLE SWORD I HAVE SEALED IT WITH A KNOT OF MY OWN HAIR I ASSUMED YOUR MEN HAD OBSERVED THIS, AND ALLOWED ME TO PASS.

HMM. YOU ARE FOLLOWING THE ETIQUETTE OF A MILITARY EMISSARY, NEGOTIATING ON THE FIELD OF BATTLE?
INDEED.
HRM.
THUS I HAVE PAID RESPECT IN SILENCE.
I AM SURPRISED YOU HAD NOT NOTICED
A DOTA-NUKI.
WHO CARRIES SUCH A WEAPON IN THESE DAYS OF PEACE? YOUR NAME?
I AM BUT A STRANGER, REMOVED FROM THESE EVENTS.
SO. YOU WON'T SAY

. . . .
. . . .
SO BE IT. I WON'T PRESS YOU.
AND SO. . . CHŌSUKE!
SIR!
I ARRANGED THIS MEETING TO FIND A PEACEFUL SOLUTION.
I'M APPALLED THAT YOU'VE GATHERED YOUR PEOPLE FOR A DISPLAY OF STRENGTH, AND HIRING A MAN OF SAMURAI BLOOD—EVEN THOUGH A RŌNIN—FOR PROTECTION? THAT'S ARROGANCE BEYOND YOUR STATION!
ALLOW ME TO SPEAK, GO-JŌDAI-SAMA. IT WAS NOT MY INTENTION TO MOUNT A SHOW OF STRENGTH. I'VE GATHERED THE PEOPLE MERELY SO THAT THEY MAY BE APPRISED OF THE RESULTS OF THESE TALKS AS QUICKLY AS POSSIBLE, AND THUS ASSUAGE THEIR FEARS.
NOR IS THIS GENTLEMAN HERE FOR MY PROTECTION. SHOULD IT BE THAT I DIE HERE THIS DAY,

I HAVE MERELY ASKED HIM TO OBSERVE ALL THAT HAPPENS.
AND REPORT IN FULL TO THE PEOPLE.
THE GENTLEMAN HAS NO INTEREST IN OUR DISPUTE. AND THUS I CONSIDERED HIM SUITABLE TO REPORT IMPARTIALLY ON ALL THAT HAPPENS.
MY PEOPLE ARE FEARFUL. I WORRY THAT THEY WILL NOT TAKE THINGS CALMLY, AND COULD FLY INTO A PANIC. THUS I REQUESTED HIS PRESENCE.



FFUU

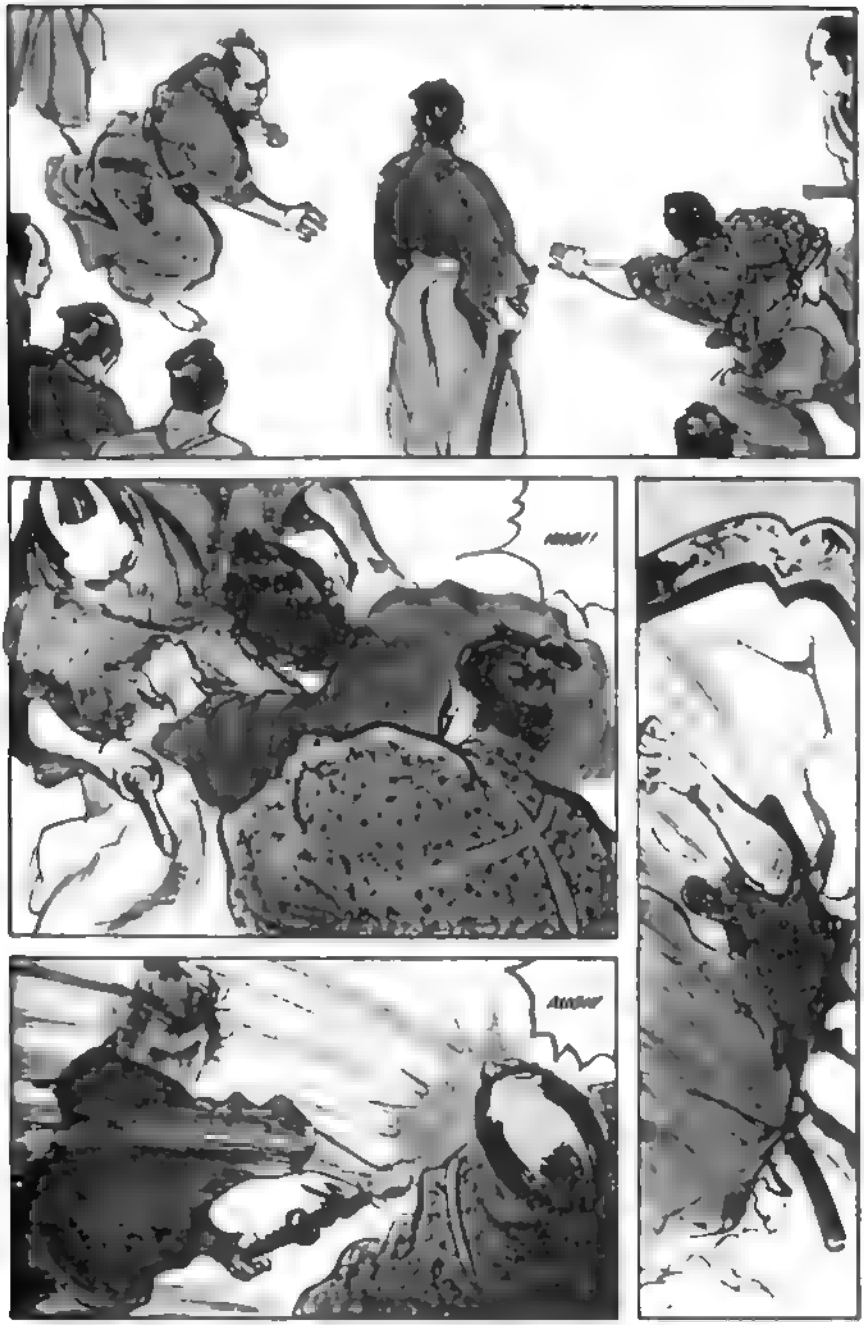
CHŌSUKE! HAVE YOU HEARD NOTHING I'VE SAID?!

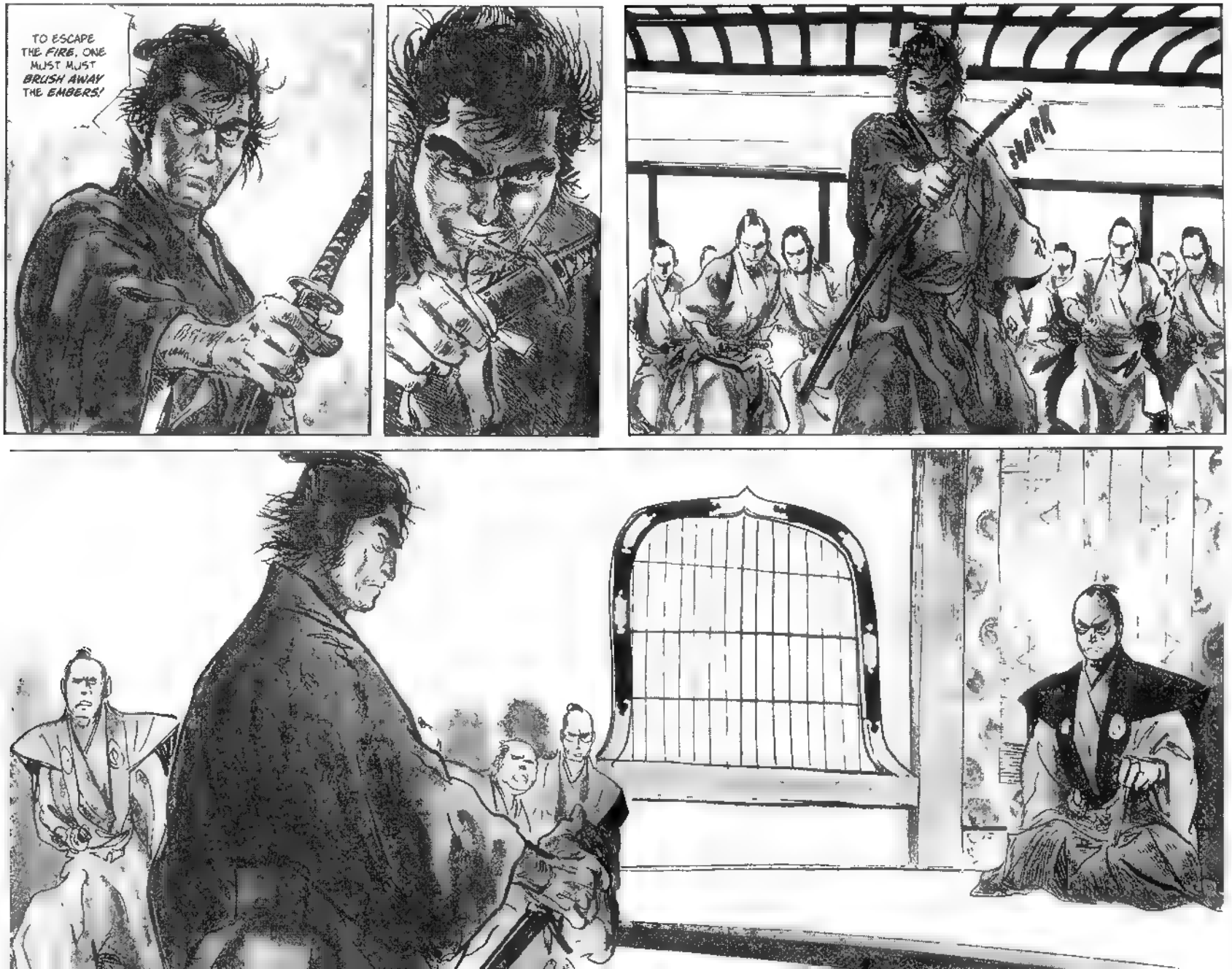
IF WE DON'T IMPLEMENT *FUNDAMENTAL AGRICULTURAL REFORMS*, ODAWARA *HAN* IS *FINISHED!*
MY LORD, IT IS THE *PEASANTS* WHO MUST *BUILD* THAT FUTURE.
IF THEY LIE *DEAD* OF *STARVATION*, HOW CAN TOMORROW COME?
ENOUGH TALK! THIS IS *FUTILE!*
IF YOU *REFUSE* TO UNDERSTAND, SO *BE* IT! I'LL USE *FORCE!* I'LL HAVE YOU *BEHEADED*, AND *TERRORIZE* YOUR DAMN PEASANTS INTO SUBMISSION!
DO YOUR WORST. DEATH BY THE *SWORD*, DEATH BY *STARVATION*. IT'S ALL THE SAME.
AS YOU WISH!

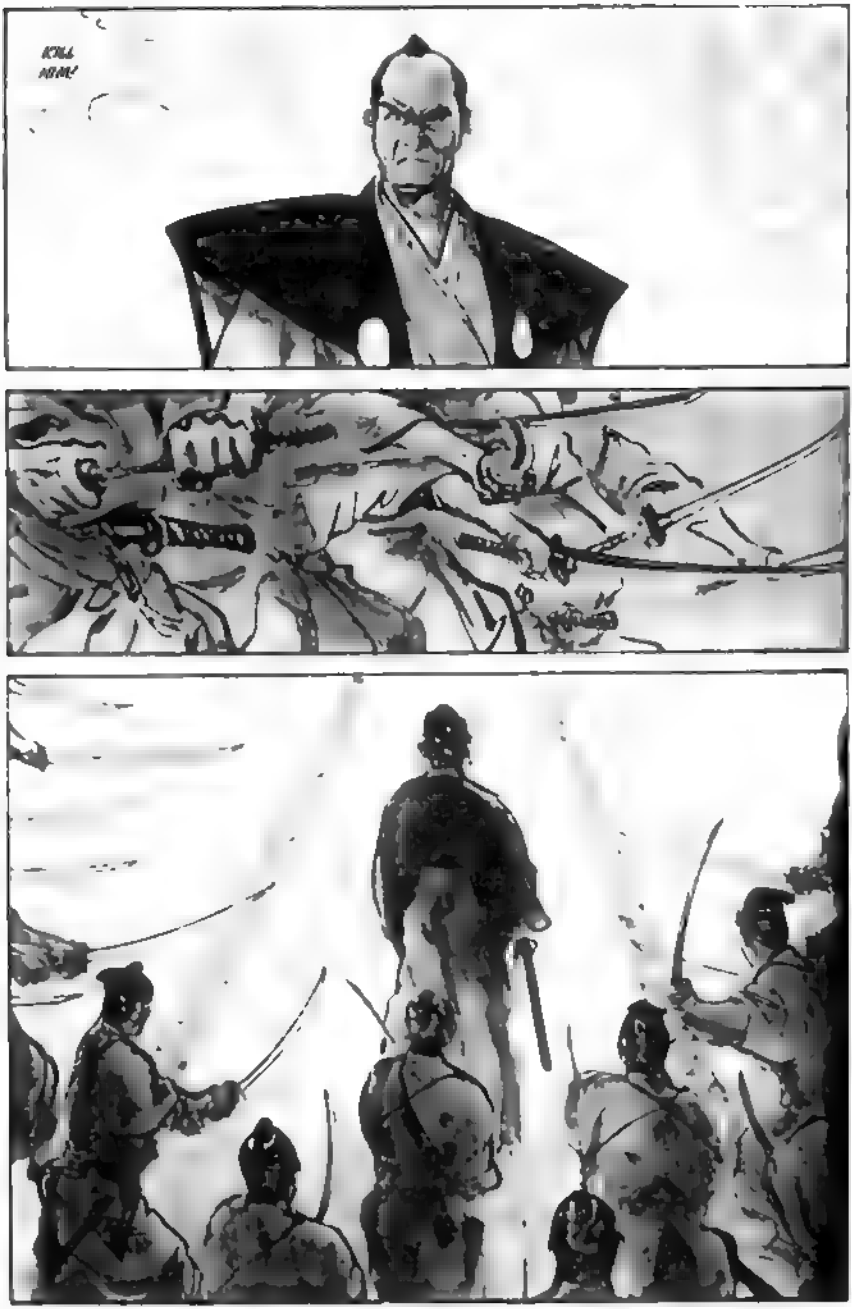
SHAKKK
SHAKK

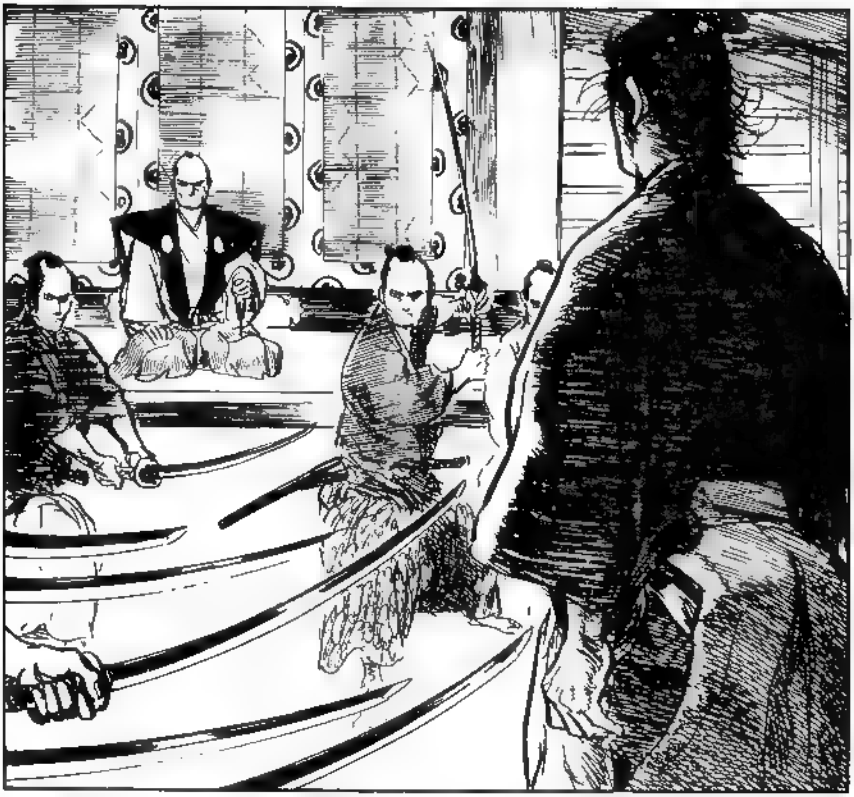
SEIZE
HIM!

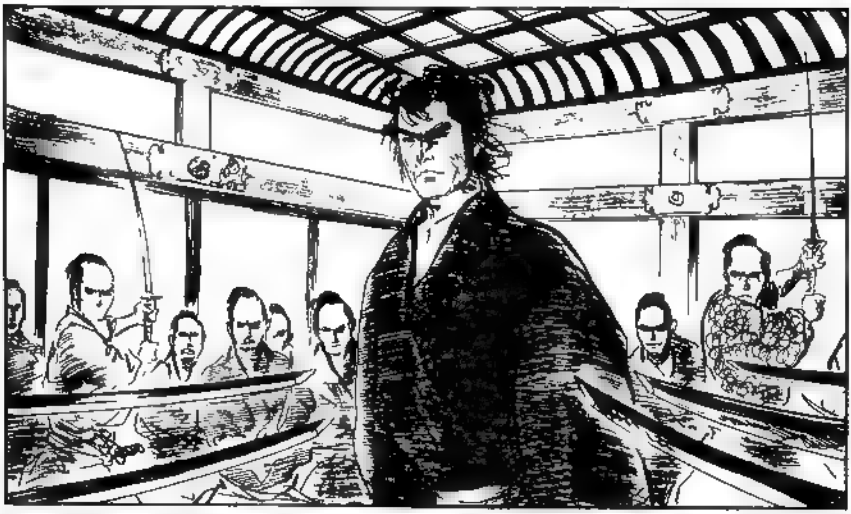
I WILL NOT STOP YOU FROM KILLING OGORI-DONO. BUT I WILL REPORT EXACTLY WHAT HAS HAPPENED
HOW DARE YOU MOCK THE



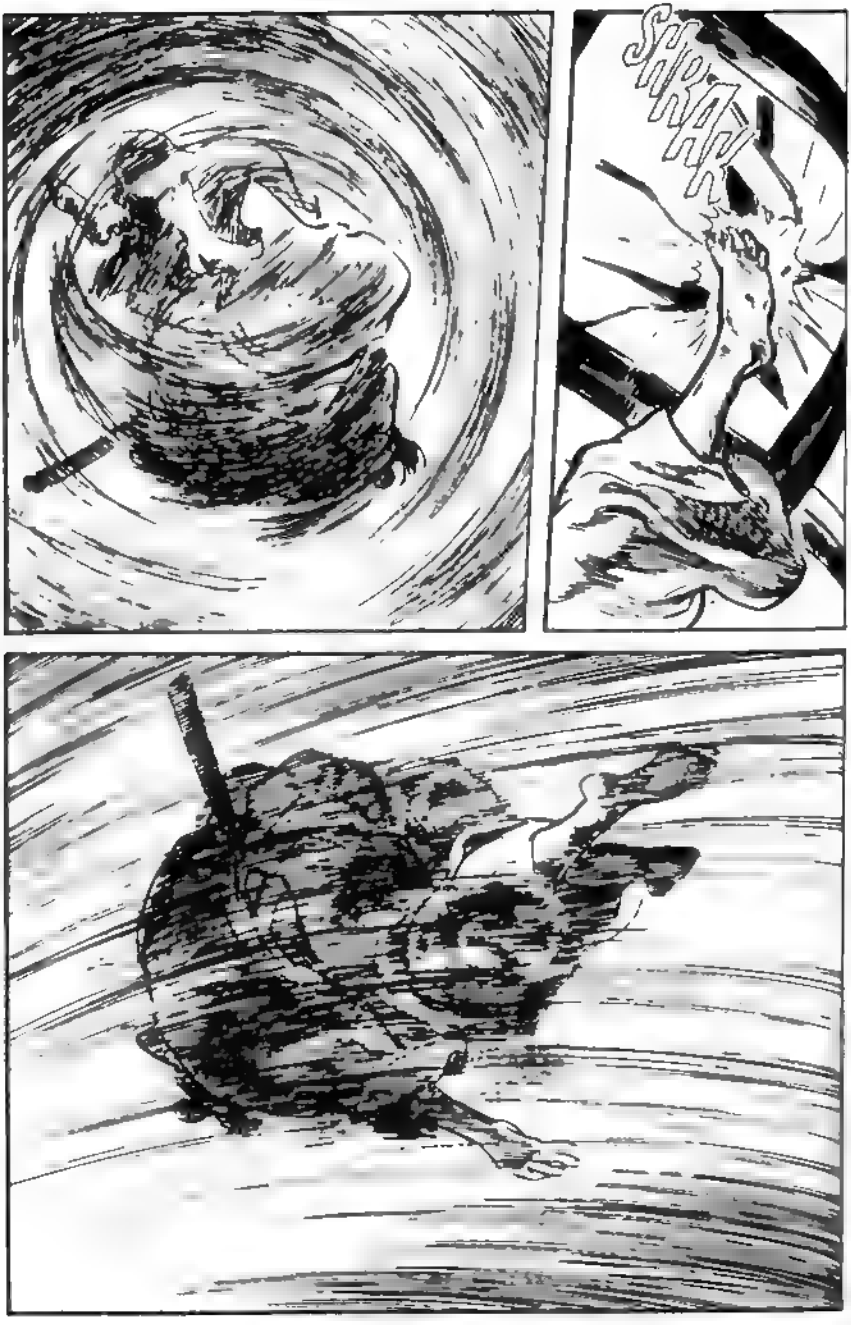

TO ESCAPE THE FIRE, ONE MUST MUST BRUSH AWAY THE EMBERS!
SHARK


KILL HIM!





KRAKK
THOK
CHUNK


SKAK

EH...?!
THAP
AA...!!

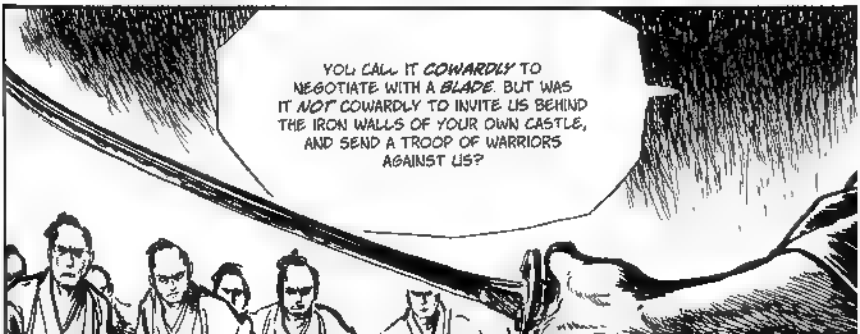
WHA...?!?
RGG!
YOU BASTARD! LOWER YOUR SWORD, OR OGOR CHÔSUKE DIES!
AS I SAID... I'M NOT HERE TO PROTECT OGORI-DONO.

I'M HERE TO OBSERVE, AND REPORT TO THE PEOPLE OF THE HAN.
KILL HIM OR NOT, AS YOU PLEASE. FOR ME, THERE IS ONLY THE RESULT
EH..?
WHAT ARE YOU WAITING FOR?!
KILL THIS MAN! CUT HIM DOWN!

DON'T WORRY ABOUT *ME*, DAMN IT! *KILL* HIM!
YOU THINK I'LL CAVE IN TO *THREATS?!* LOWER YOUR *BLADE!* IF YOU HAVE A *SAMURAI'S* HEART, *CEASE* THIS *COWARDICE* AND DIE BY THE SWORD! EVEN COMING HERE AS A *SECOND*, YOU MUST HAVE BEEN PREPARED FOR *DEATH!*

IF YOU DIE LIKE A SAMURAI, I'LL BURY YOU LIKE ONE. LOWER YOUR SWORD!
YOUR PLOY WON'T WORK ON SOMEONE WHO LIVES READY TO DIE!

PERHAPS NOT . YET EVEN IF IT WON'T WORK ON YOU, IT WORKS YOUR MEN
IF YOU DIE. THE FATE OF ODAWARA IS SEALED! NO AGRICULTURAL REFORM. NO FIRST STEP TOWARD BETTER HARVESTS.
NO ONE WHO KNOWS THAT CAN LET YOU PERISH

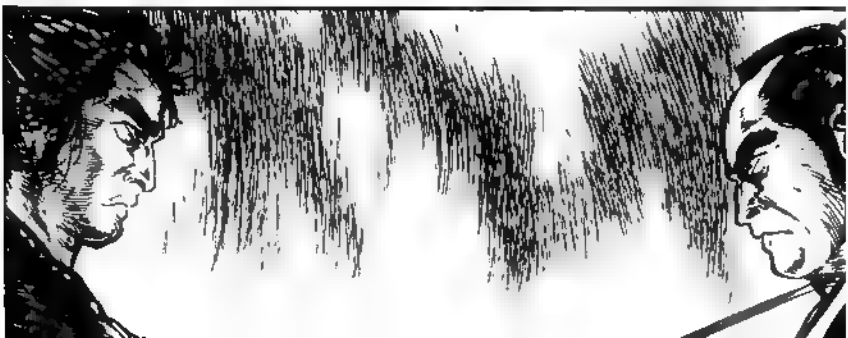

YOU CALL IT COWARDLY TO NEGOTIATE WITH A BLADE. BUT WAS IT NOT COWARDLY TO INVITE US BEHIND THE IRON WALLS OF YOUR OWN CASTLE, AND SEND A TROOP OF WARRIORS AGAINST US?

THOSE IN THE SEATS OF POWER OFT FORGET THEIR FAILINGS AND SEEK ONLY THE OBEISANCE OF OTHERS! THUS IS BAD GOVERNMENT BORN!
HOLD IN YOUR HEART THAT YOU AND THE PEOPLE ARE ONE, HUMAN BEINGS ALL, AND GOOD GOVERNMENT SHALL ARISE OF ITS OWN ACCORD!
SUCH IS THE PATH OF VIRTUE!
HRM. !
WHO ARE YOU?
I TOLD YOU—A PASSING STRANGER.

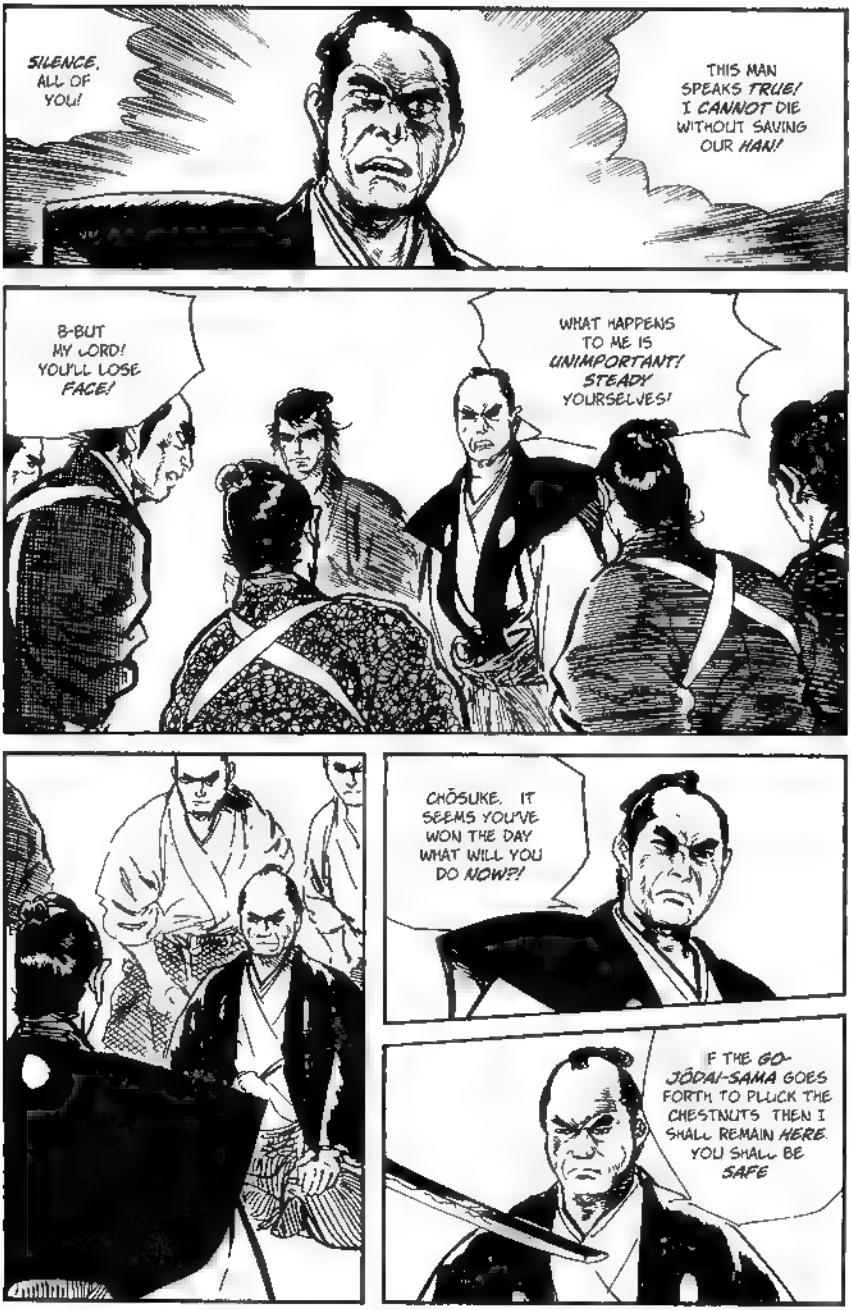
THUS I UNDERSTAND THE SUFFERING OF THE PEOPLE AND THE THINKING OF THE CASTLE.
AND AS THINGS STAND NOW, IT IS AS CLEAR AS A FIRE IN THE NIGHT NEITHER OF YOU WILL GIVE GROUND, AND ALL WILL END IN BLOODSHED
THEN WHAT DO YOU SUGGEST WE DO?!

IF YOU WISH TO PLUCK THE ROASTED CHESTNUTS, YOU MUST STEP INTO THE FIRE
MUST NOT YOU BOTH STAND IN THE OTHER'S SHOES?

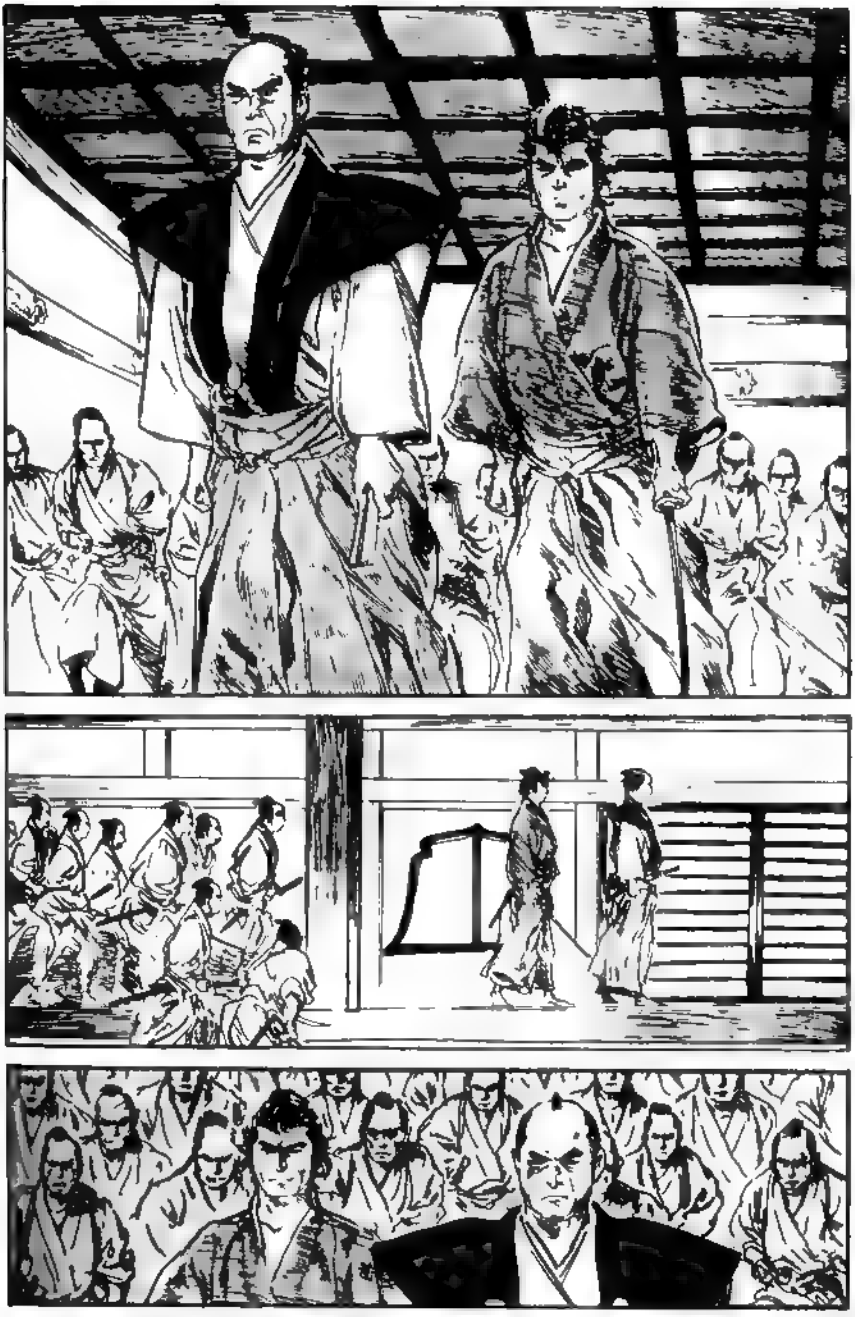
TO PLUCK THE CHESTNUTS, STEP INTO THE FIRE.



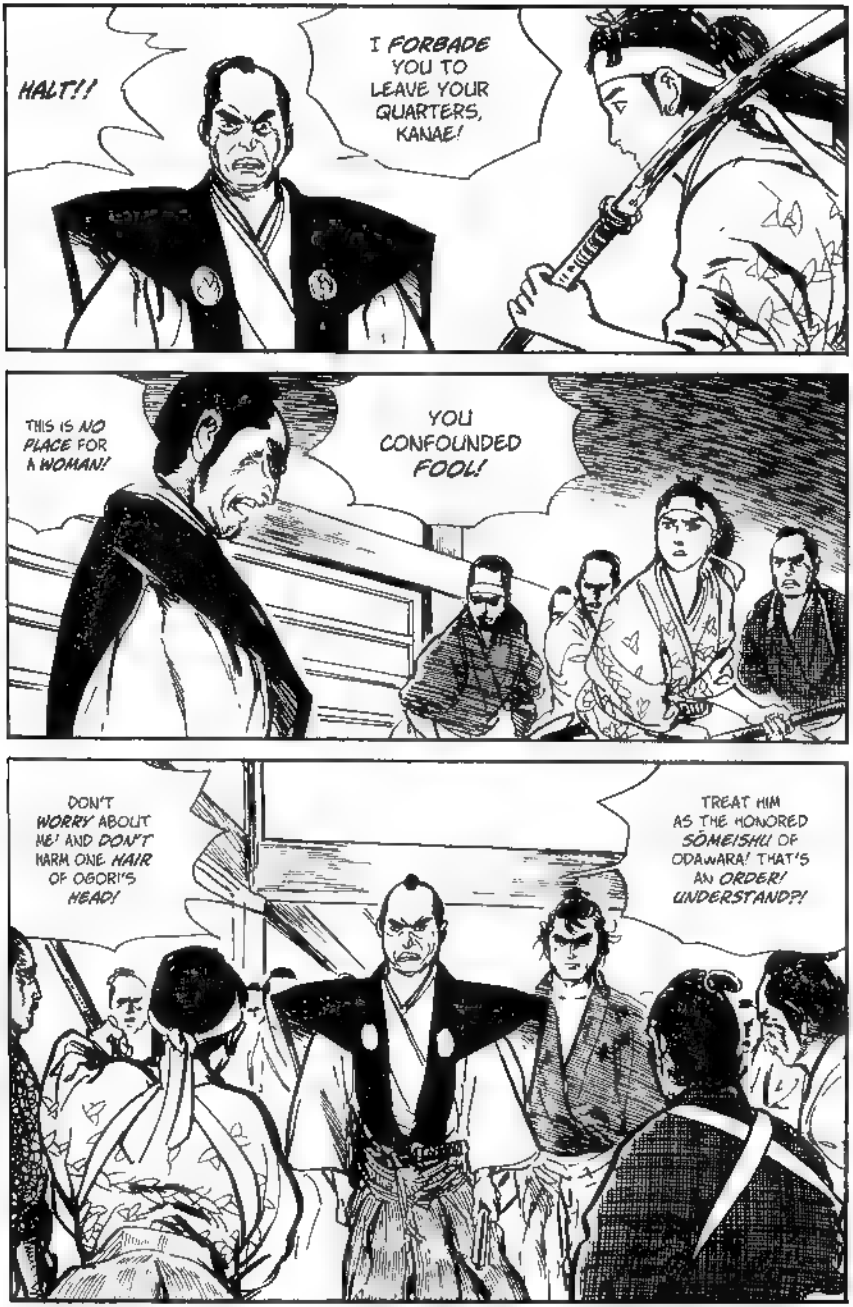
PLEASE STAND, MY LORD MY MISSION IS TO ESCAPE THIS CASTLE, AND REPORT TO THOSE WHO WAIT
I REQUEST THAT YOU GUIDE ME.
BASTARD!
YOU CAN'T TREAT THE GO-JŌDAI THAT WAY!
YOU'LL PAY FOR THIS!
WE'LL SLAUGHTER YOUR PRECIOUS PEASANTS!
?! GO-JŌDAI?!
YOU'RE DOING WHAT HE SAYS?!

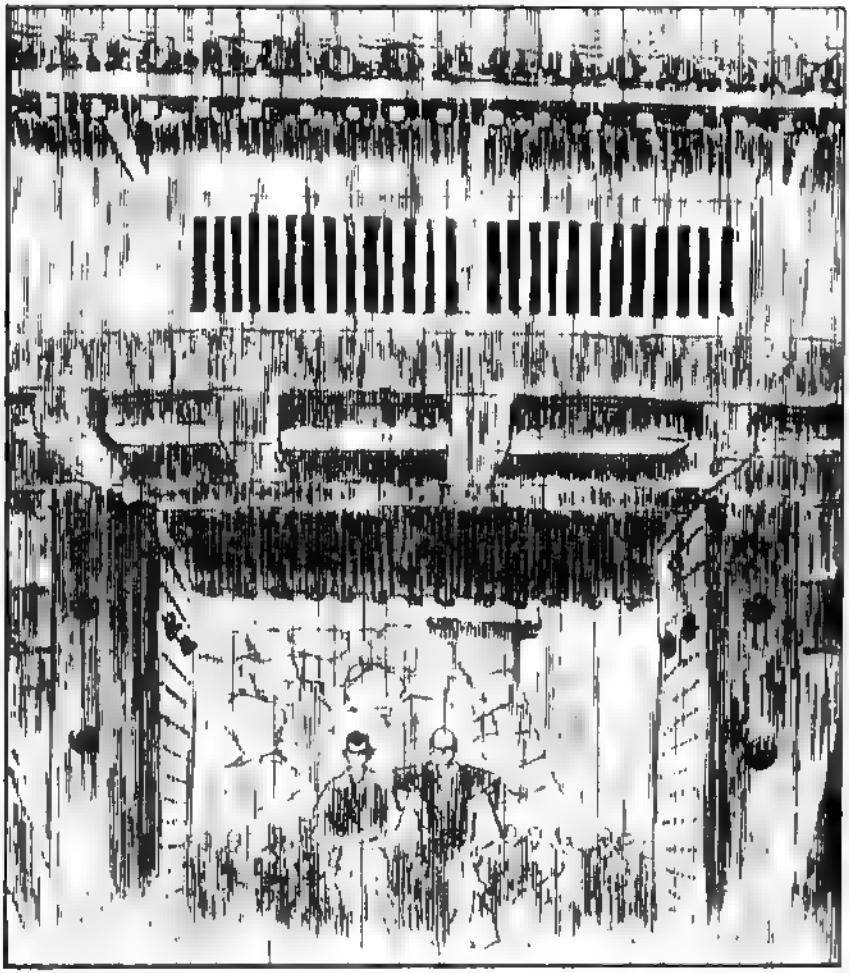

SILENCE, ALL OF YOU!
THIS MAN SPEAKS TRUE! I CANNOT DIE WITHOUT SAVING OUR HAN!
B-BUT MY LORD! YOU'LL LOSE FACE!
WHAT HAPPENS TO ME IS UNIMPORTANT! STEADY YOURSELVES!
CHŌSUKE. IT SEEMS YOU'VE WON THE DAY WHAT WILL YOU DO NOW?!
IF THE GO-JŌDAI-SAMA GOES FORTH TO PLUCK THE CHESTNUTS THEN I SHALL REMAIN HERE. YOU SHALL BE SAFE

HRN.
OGAMI-SAMA. THANK YOU. THANK YOU FOR EVERYTHING
WHATEVER HAPPENS, WE WILL NEVER FORGET NEVER!



FATHER!!
CURSE YOU! HOW DARE A MISERABLE RŌNIN COMMIT THIS OUTRAGE! UNFORGIVABLE!
RECEIVE YOUR PUNISHMENT!

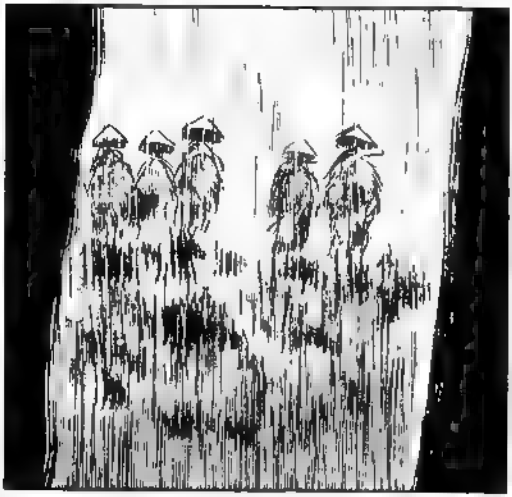

HALT!!
I FORBADE YOU TO LEAVE YOUR QUARTERS, KANAE!
THIS IS NO PLACE FOR A WOMAN!
YOU CONFOUNDED FOOL!
DON'T WORRY ABOUT ME! AND DON'T HARM ONE HAIR OF OBORI'S HEAD!
TREAT HIM AS THE HONORED SŌMEISHU OF ODAWARA! THAT'S AN ORDER! UNDERSTAND?!



AHH?! IT'S IT'S TH' GO-JŌDAI-SAMA!
THE GO-JŌDAI-SAMA..?!
THE GO-JŌDAI DESIRES TO SPEAK WITH YOU, AND TO SEE FOR HIMSELF THE CONDITIONS IN WHICH YOU LIVE.

HE. HE SHOULDN' OUGHTA
FURTHERMORE! OGORI-DONO REMAINS IN THE CASTLE OF HIS OWN FREE WILL
YOU HAVE NOTHING TO FEAR
.....
....!!
"TO PLUCK THE CHESTNUT, STEP INTO THE FIRE." YOU'VE TAUGHT ME A FINE LESSON IT WAS ESSENTIAL TO SUMMON OGORI TO THE CASTLE BUT IT WAS ALSO ESSENTIAL TO LEAVE THE CASTLE, AND MEET THE PEASANTS FACE TO FACE

OSORI, TOO HE MOVED MY HEART WHEN HE VOLUNTEERED TO STAY BEHIND TO GUARANTEE MY SAFETY
I AM IN YOUR DEBT, SIR YOUR ADMONITION AT THAT CRITICAL MOMENT I FELT LIKE I'D BEEN DOUSED WITH COLD WATER
NOW THE HARD PART BEGINS.
HOW TRUE I MUST USE THIS OPPORTUNITY TO PERSUADE THE PEASANTS
I'LL DO WHATEVER IT TAKES WE MUST BUILD ODAWARA'S FUTURE TOGETHER!

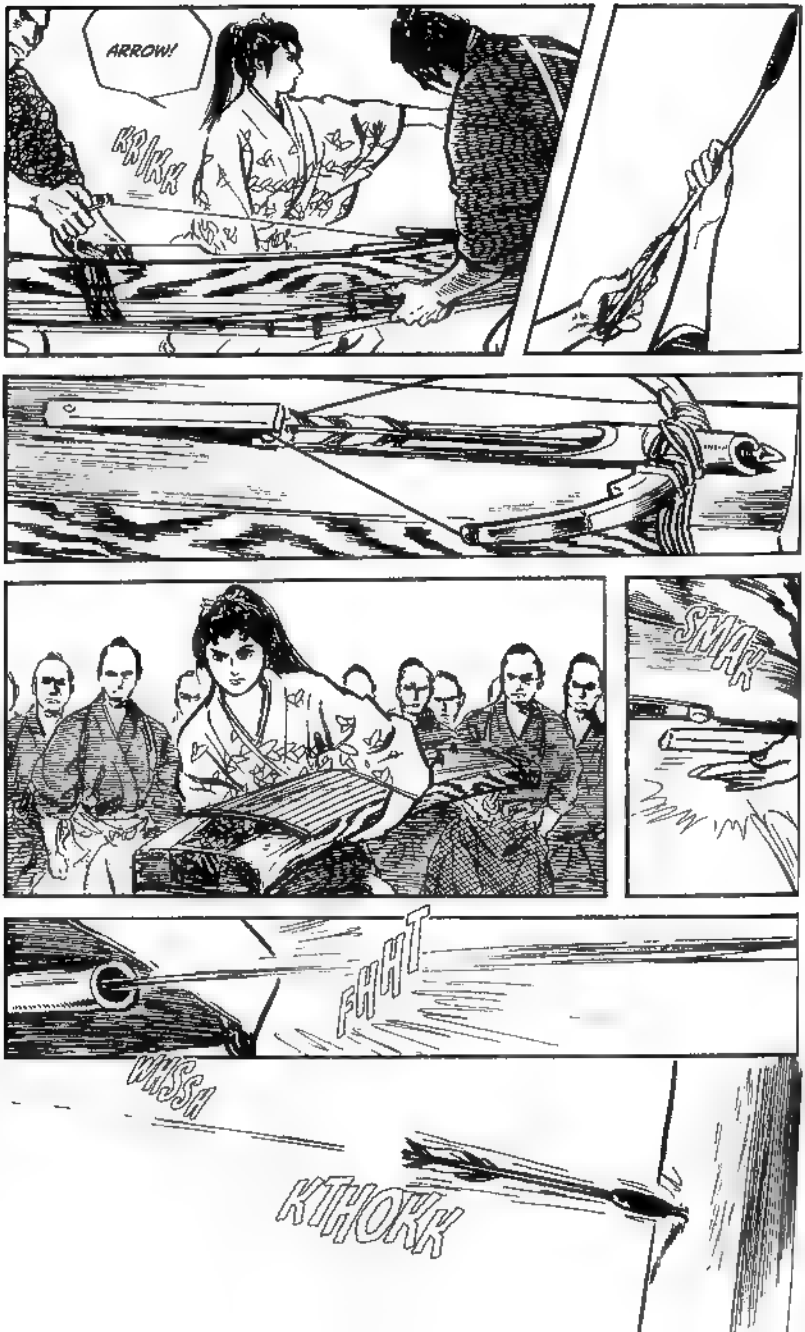


YOU PATHETIC COWARDS!
TAKK
MY FATHER'S BEEN TAKEN HOSTAGE! THE PEASANTS MOCK US! DON'T YOU EVEN CARE?!
YOU CALL YOURSELVES SAMURAI?! THE DEFENDERS OF ODAWARA?! IF THIS HAD BEEN A BATTLE, WHERE WOULD WE BE?!
PARALYZED BY A NAMELESS, RAGGED RŌNIN?! HE WALKED ALL OVER YOU!
HAH! THE GREAT ODAWARA HANSHI!
KANAE-SAMA YOU SPEAK RASHLY
WHAT?!
YOUR FATHER THE GO-JŌDAI-SAMA CHOSE TO GO OF HIS OWN FREE WILL AS I, TOO, CHOSE TO REMAIN.
ODAWARA'S FUTURE HANGS IN THE BALANCE, TEETERING BETWEEN LIFE AND DEATH. PLEASE. CALM YOURSELF
S-SILENCE!!
STILL ACTING TOUGH, PEASANT SCUM?! IF IT WEREN'T FOR MY FATHERS ORDERS, YOUR HEAD WOULD BE FROM YOUR BODY THIS VERY INSTANT!
TAKE HIM AWAY!

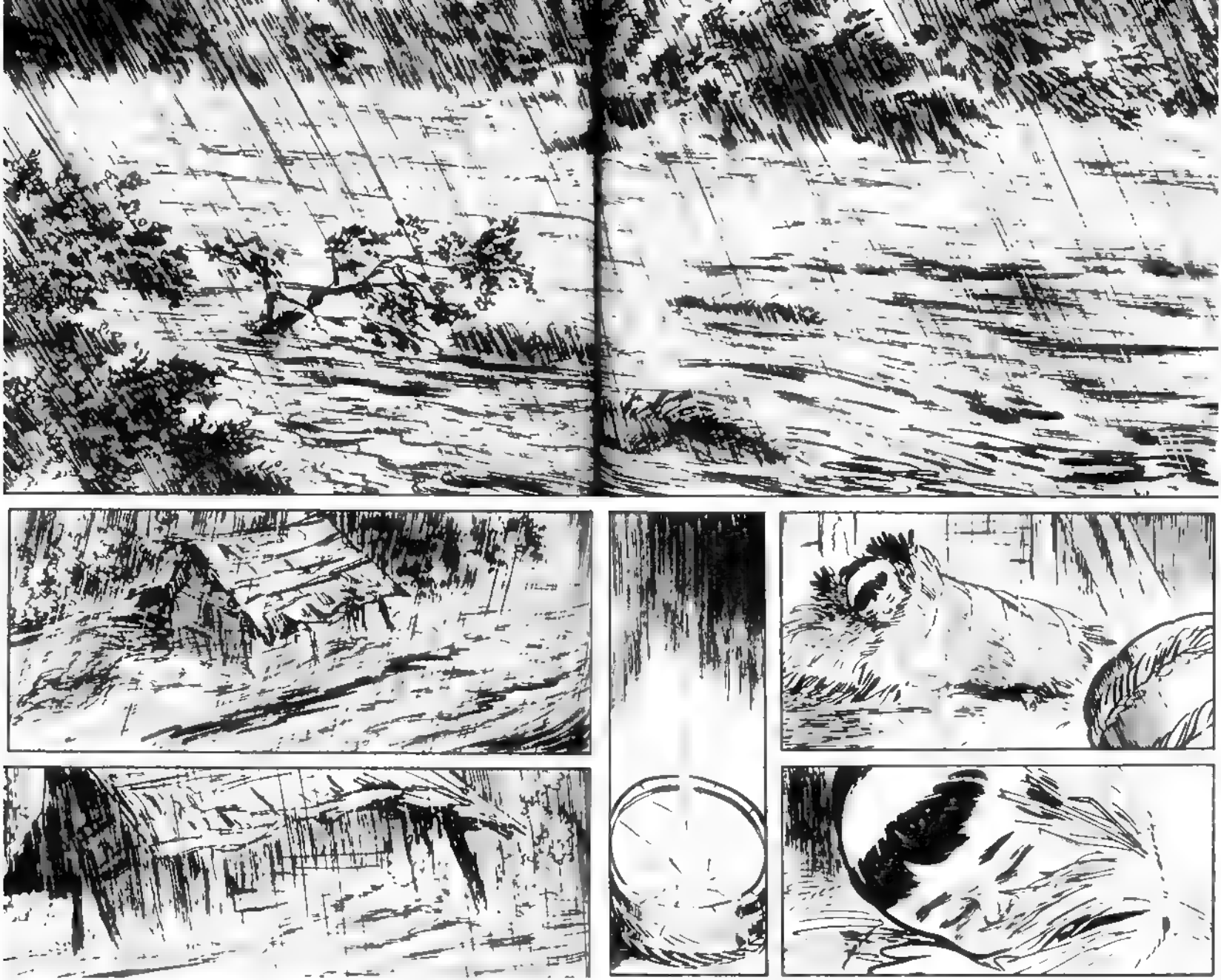
NOTHING CAN COME FROM TALKING WITH PEASANTS!
MY FATHER'S ACTING LIKE A FOOL!
ANYTHING COULD HAPPEN TO HIM OUT THERE
AND THAT MYSTERIOUS RŌNIN. WHO ON EARTH
WAIT!! AN AGENT OF THE EDO RŌJŪ?!
WHAT?!
DO. .DO YOU REALLY THINK. .?
THAT'S IT!! HE HAS TO BE!
WHY ELSE WOULD HE SIDE WITH THOSE FILTHY PEASANTS?! A WANDERING BEGGAR MIGHT RISK HIS LIFE FOR PAY, BUT
THE PEASANTS DON'T HAVE THAT KIND OF MONEY!
SO WHY WOULD HE TAKE HIS LIFE INTO HIS HANDS AND ENTER OUR CASTLE?!
WE'VE BEEN TRICKED!

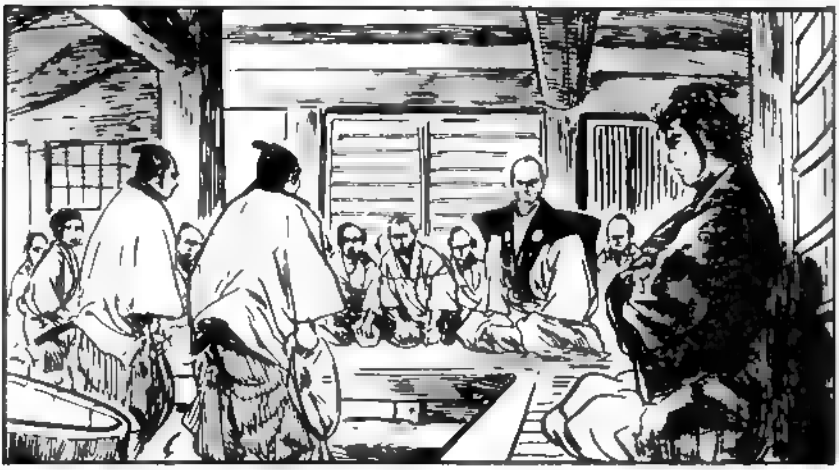
I'LL BET HE'S NIWABAN! THE PEASANTS SOLD US OUT AND PETITIONED THE SHŌGUNATE! THAT'S WHY HE CAME! TO SPY ON US!
DON'T YOU SEE?!
IT IT COULD BE TRUE..
HOW COULD FATHER BE SO CARELESS?! HE LET THAT MAN TRICK HIM INTO GOING. HE'S PRACTICALLY A PRISONER!
YES! THAT EXPLAINS EVERYTHING!
DAMN IT!
I THINK KANAE-SAMA'S RIGHT
THERE'S NO REASON FOR HIM TO HELP THE PEASANTS!
BUT IF HE'S AN O-NIWABAN..!
THAT DECIDES IT! WE'LL KILL THE PEASANTS AND RESCUE THE GO-JŌDAI!
HE'S RIGHT!
EVERYONE! PREPARE FOR BATTLE!
WAIT!
?? KANAE-SAMA..?!

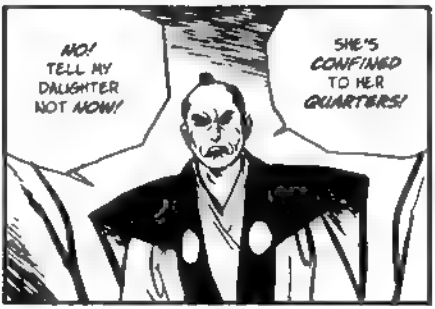
HE'S A MASTER SWORDSMAN! IF WE'RE NOT CAREFUL, HE'LL KILL FATHER FIRST.
BUT IF WE CAN GET RID OF HIM, THE REST IS EASY!
THAT'S IT! BRING ME MY KOTO!
YOUR.. KOTO? WHAT FOR?!
YOU HEARD ME! MY THIRTEEN-STRING KOTO!
I HAVE A PLAN!


ARROW!
KRIKK
SMAK
FHHT
WHSSH
KTHOKK

PERFECT!
KANAE-SAMA!
TELL MY FATHER THAT I *MUST* SEE HIM.
WHAT DAUGHTER *WOULDN'T* WORRY FOR HER FATHER'S SAFETY? SAY I WANT TO COMFORT HIM AFTER HIS LONG MEETINGS WITH SOME SOOTHING *KOTO* MUSIC!
MY LADY!
NOW—UNDERSTAND? YOU WAIT IN AMBUSH UNTIL I *SHOOT!* THEN CHARGE AND TAKE OUT THE PEASANTS!
YES, MY LADY!

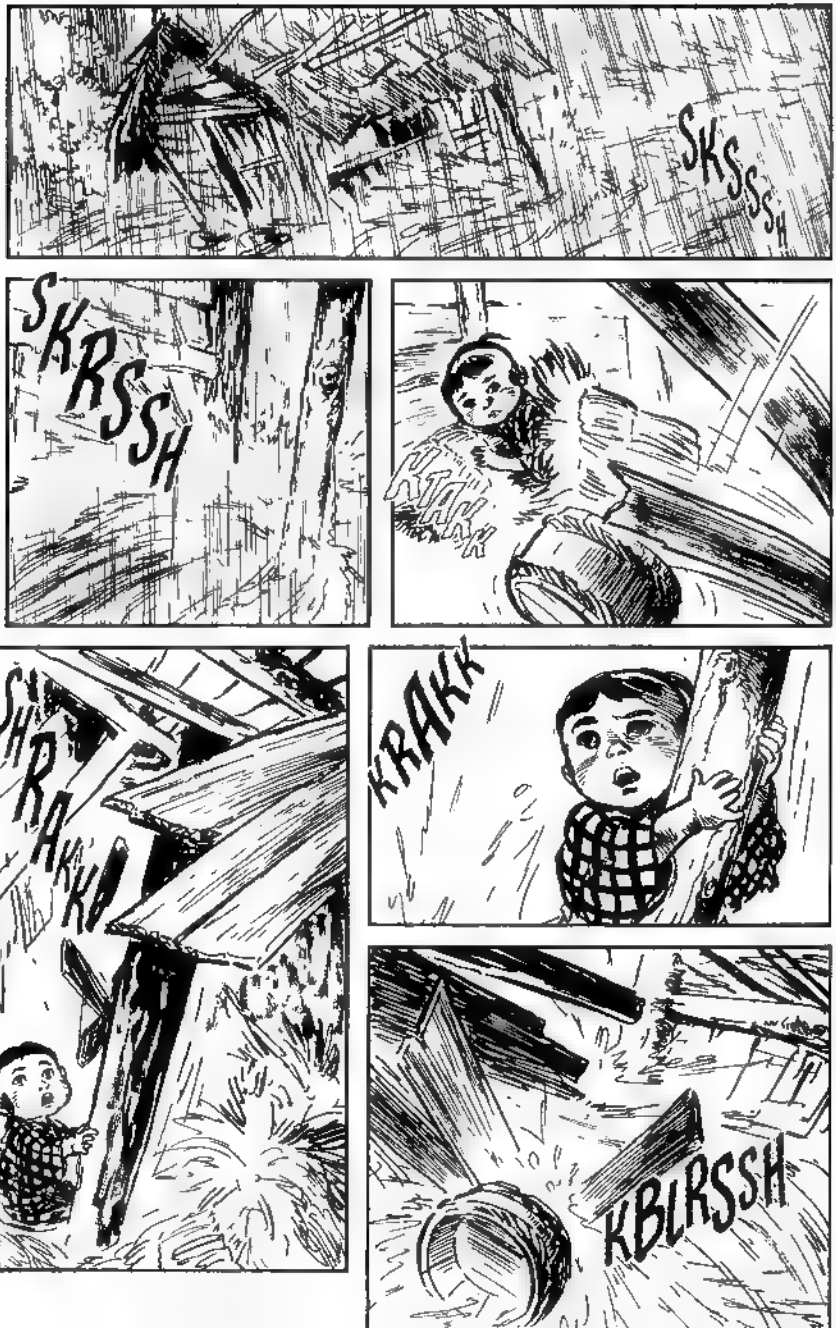


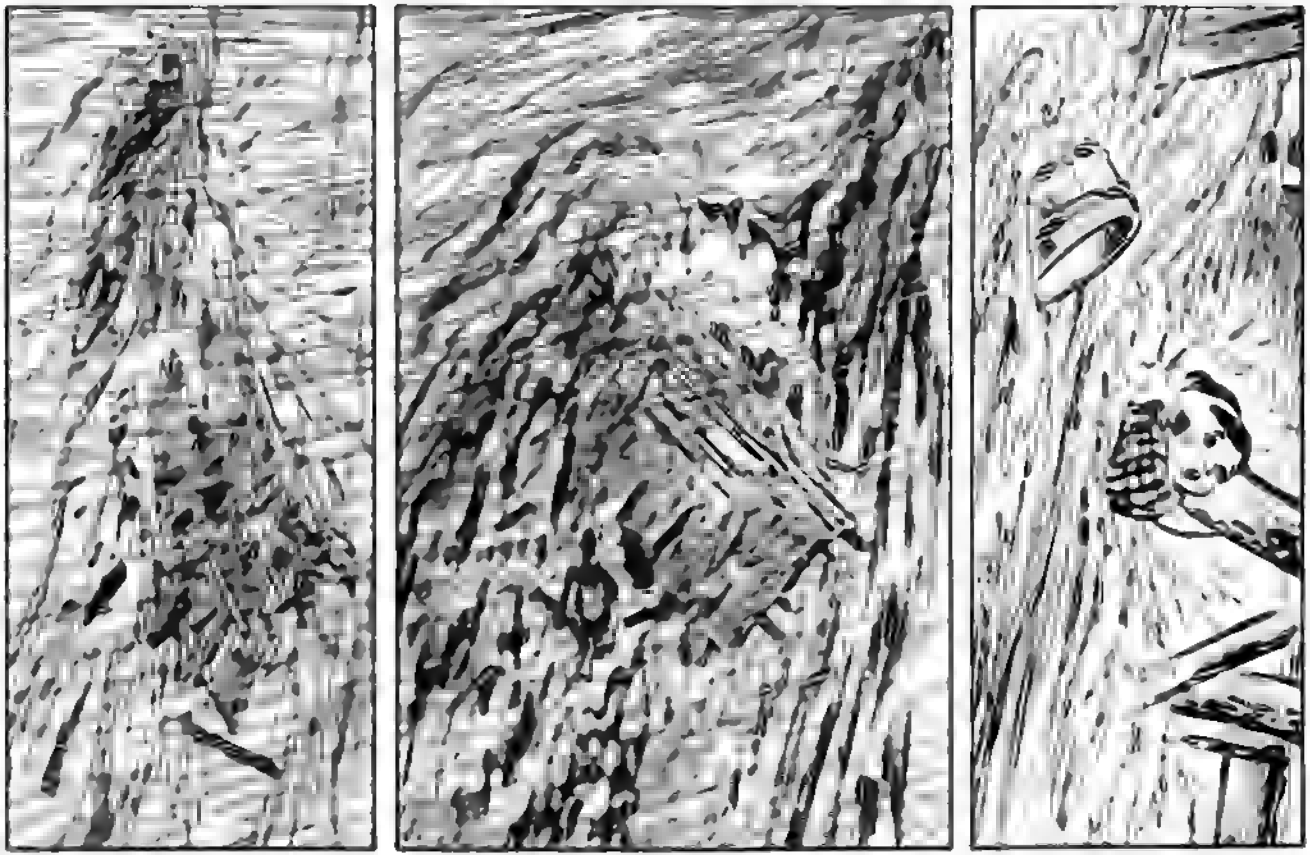


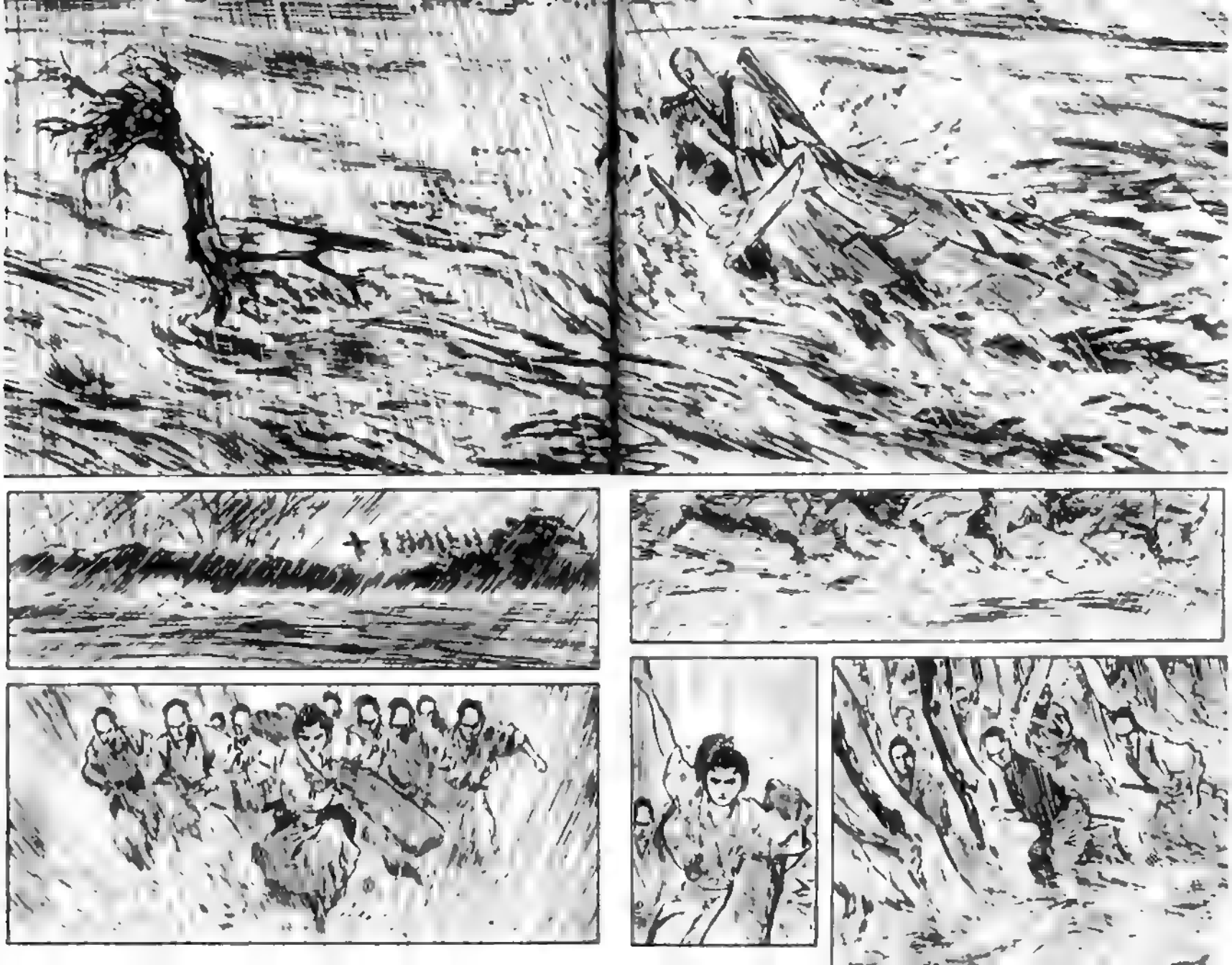

NO! TELL MY DAUGHTER NOT NOW!
SHE'S CONFINED TO HER QUARTERS!

B-BUT, SIR KANAE-SAMA'S ALREADY ON HER WAY
CONFOUND THAT GIRL!

HELP! EVERYONE, HELP!! THE RIVER'S GONNA OVERFLOW!
IT'S COMIN' ON A FLOOD FOR SURE!
WHAT?!
THE FOLK DOWNSTREAM GOTTA HEAD FOR HIGH GROUND!
'N YOU FOLK UPSTREAM, LEND A HAND!
THIS IS URGENT! WE'LL WORK TOGETHER TO EVACUATE THE DOWNSTREAM COMMUNITIES!
WE'LL CONTINUE THESE TALKS LATER!


SKSSSSSH
SKRSSH
KRAKK
SHRAKK
KBLRSSH





FATHER!
DIDN'T I FORBID YOU TO LEAVE YOUR ROOMS?!
GET BACK TO THE CASTLE IMMEDIATELY!

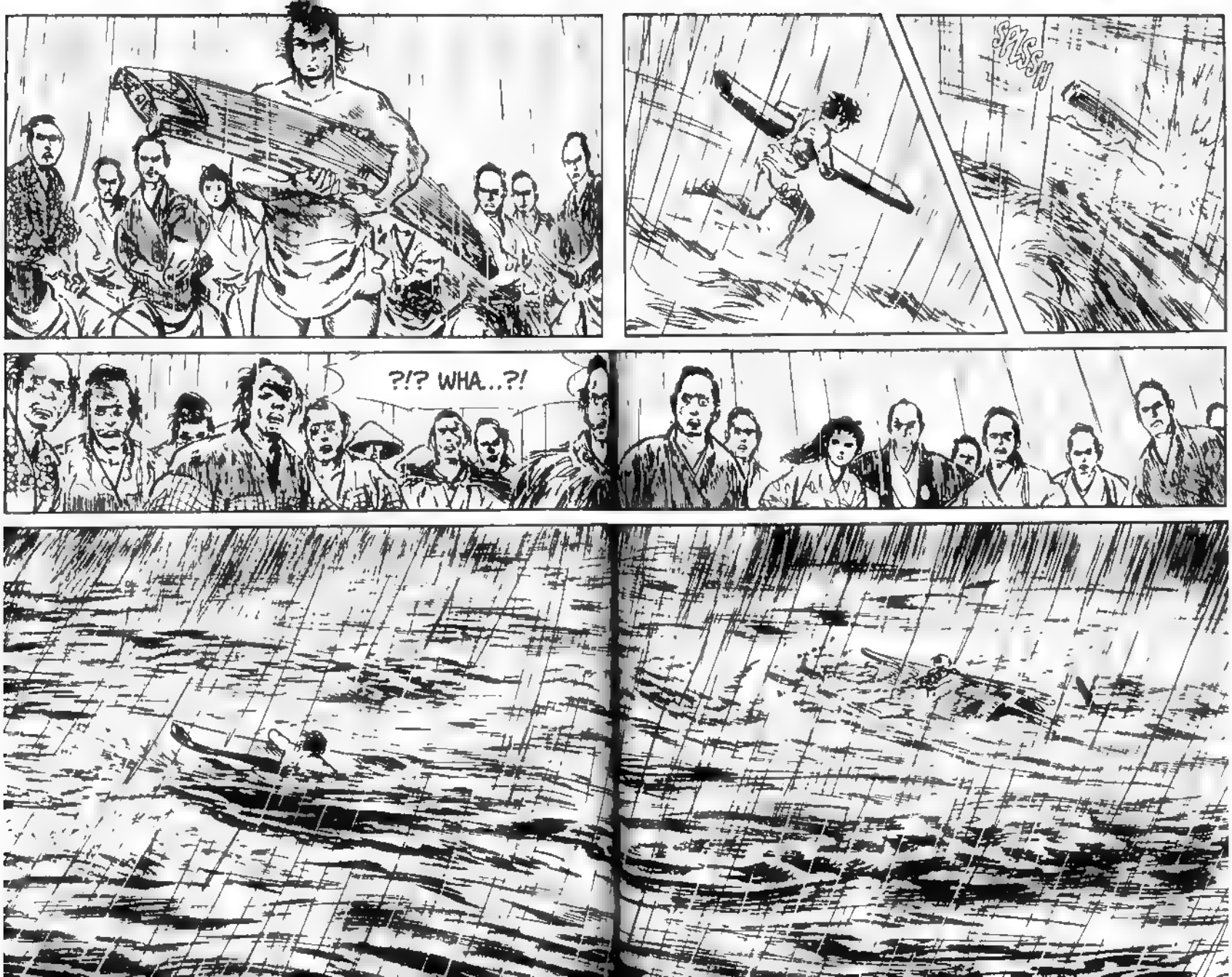
BUT FATHER

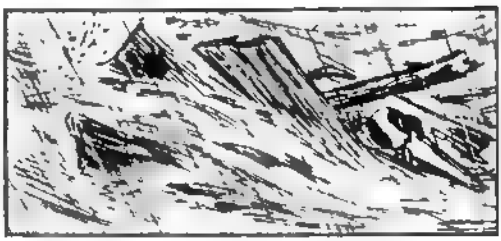
FWHITT
RYAAAAH!

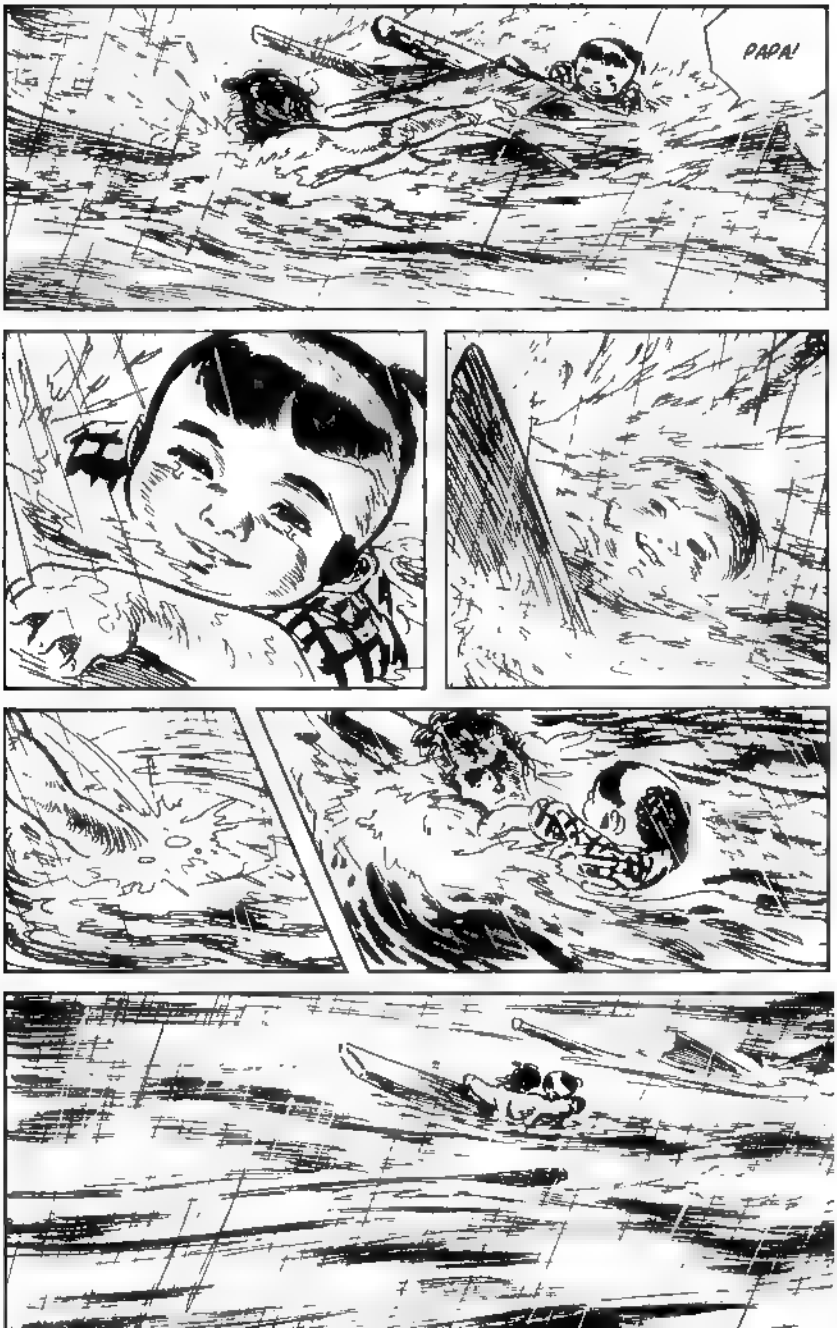
YOU FOOLS!!
HALT! HALT!!
BUT FATHER! THAT MAN'S AN O-NIWABAN FROM EDO! HE'S A SPY!
GO-JŌON! THE PEASANTS ARE IN CONTACT WITH THE RŌJŪ! IT ALL FITS!
WHAT?!

PROTECT THE GO-RONIN-SAMA!
HE'S OUR ONLY FRIEND!
DAMMIT ALL! WE'LL DIE FIGHTIN'!
WHO'S A'FEARED A' THEM CASTLE SAMURAI?!
THE TALKIN'S OVER! IF WE'RE GONNA DIE, WE'LL GO DOWN FIGHTIN'!
WHAT?! PEASANT SCUM!
DEFY US, WILL YOU?!

LOOKEE!! IT'S A KID!!
THERE'S A KID IN THE RIVER!!
FWP
AHH?!


SHSH
?!? WHA..?!




PAPA!

HE GOT "IM!!
OOOH!
H'RAHHH!!
GO-RŌNIN-SAMA!!

PAPA!
D
DAI-
GORO

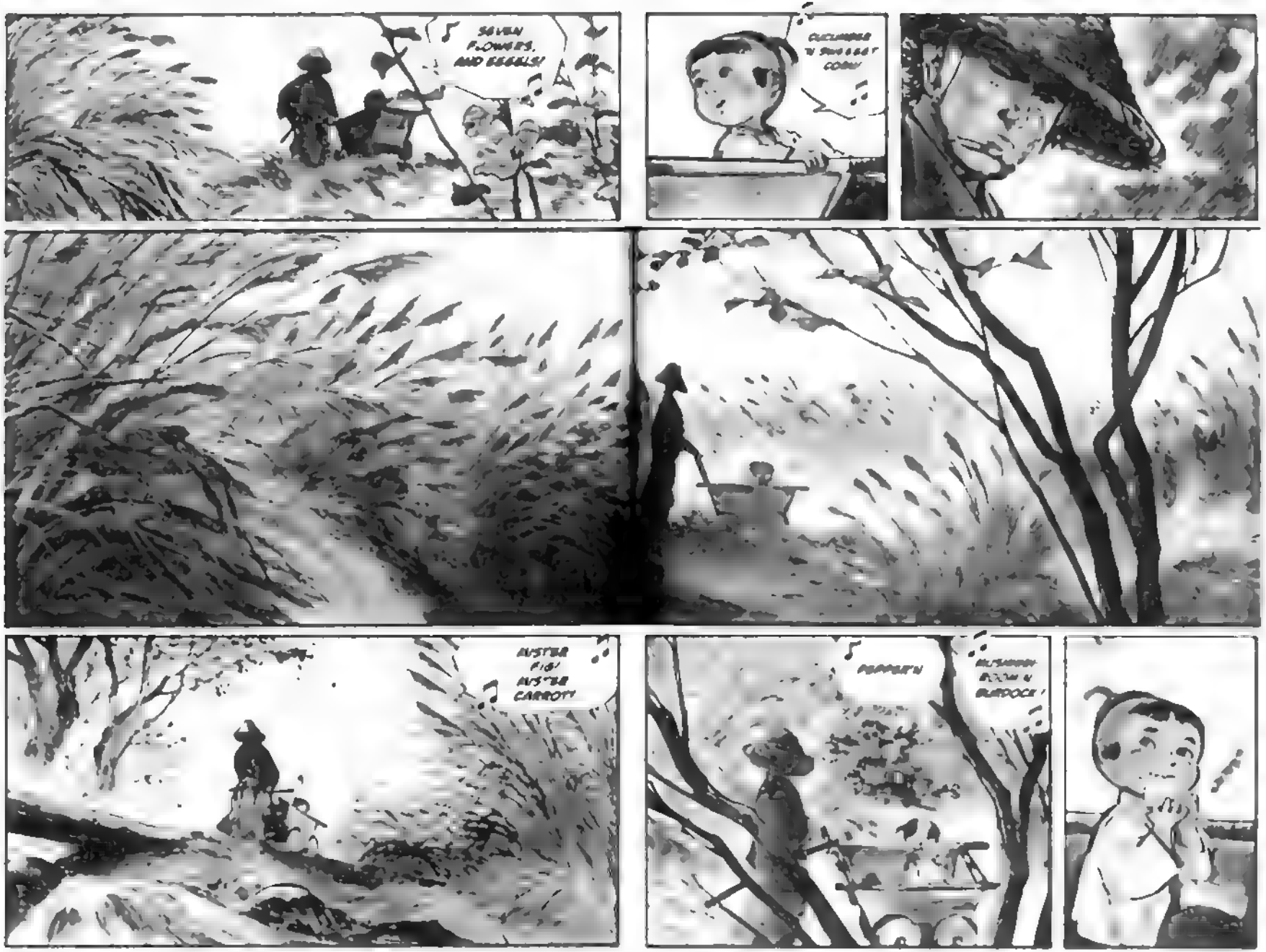
LIFE.
PRECIOUS
LIFE PRECIOUS
ABOVE ALL
THINGS .
PRECIOUS
BEYOND WORDS.
AT LAST I
UNDERSTAND
FROM THE BOTTOM
OF MY HEART

the fifty-eighth

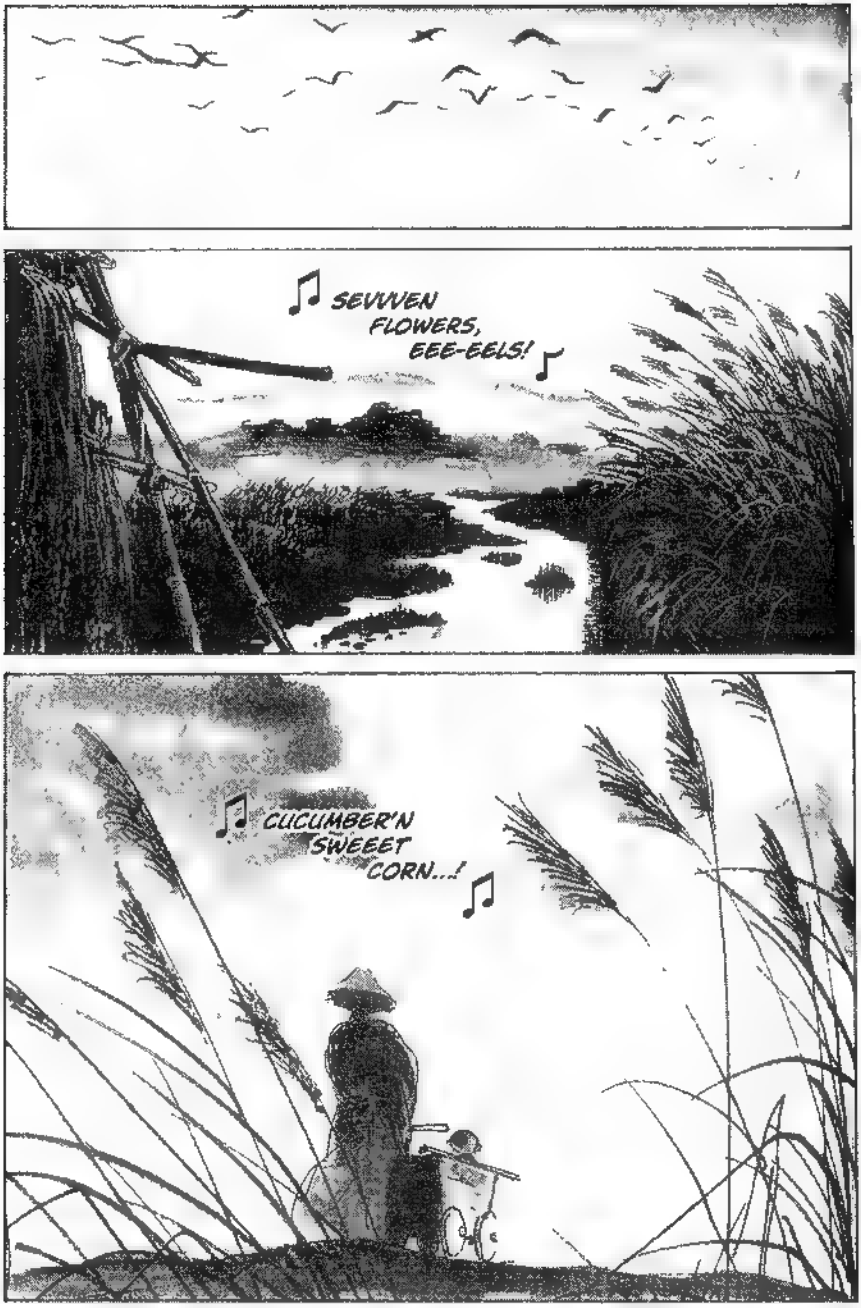
A Poem for the Grave

MISTER PIG! MISTER CARROT!
PEPPER AND MUSHROOM!!
BURDOCK 'N BARLEY!
SEVEN FLOWERS, 'N EELS!

CUUUCUMBER,
SWEET CORN!
MISTER FIG! MISTER CARROT!
PEPPER'N MUSHHHHROOM!
BURDOCK AND BARLEY!

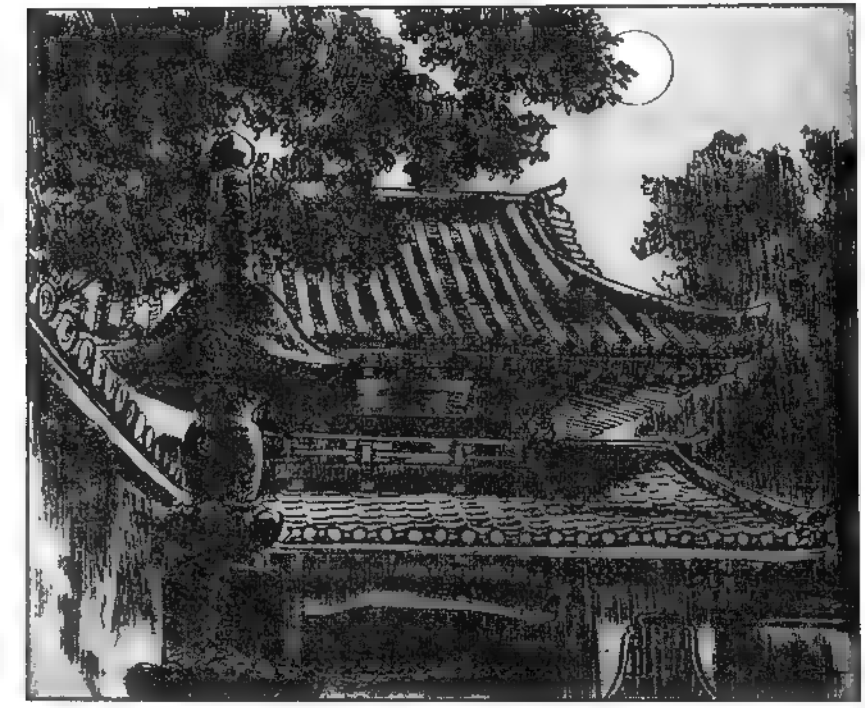

SEVEN FLOWERS, AND EEEELS!
CUCUMBER 'N SWEEEET CORN!
MUSHROOM 'N BURDOCK!
PEPPER'N
MISTER FIG! MISTER CARROT!

SHKK
SHKK


SEVVVEN FLOWERS, EEE-EELS!
CUCUMBER'N SWEEET CORN...!

FATHER AND SON,
REUNITED TRULY
THIS FATED PAIR
WERE BOUND BY
TIES BEYOND THE
KEN OF MEN.

NOW THEY SET FOOT AGAIN ON THEIR JOURNEY OF *ASSASSINATION* AND *VENGEANCE*
LITTLE HAD CHANGED, EXCEPT THAT THIS NEW *CHILD'S CART* NO LONGER CONCEALED THE *REPEATING RIFLE* THAT HAD BEEN THE LIVING SPIRIT OF THE GUNSMITH SHICHIRŌBEI
IN ITS PLACE, IT HELD THE *KAGYŪ LETTER*, THE LETTER THEY HAD SEIZED ON THE BORDER ON *LIFE* AND *DEATH*
IT WAS THE FULL FLUSH OF AUTUMN.



IT'S OFFICIAL CORRESPONDENCE TO THE *RŌJŪ* IN EDO FROM THE *KYOTO SHOSHIDAI*
HE REPORTS ON THE AFFAIRS OF THE IMPERIAL COURT. FINDS NO CAUSE FOR CONCERN.
HMM.

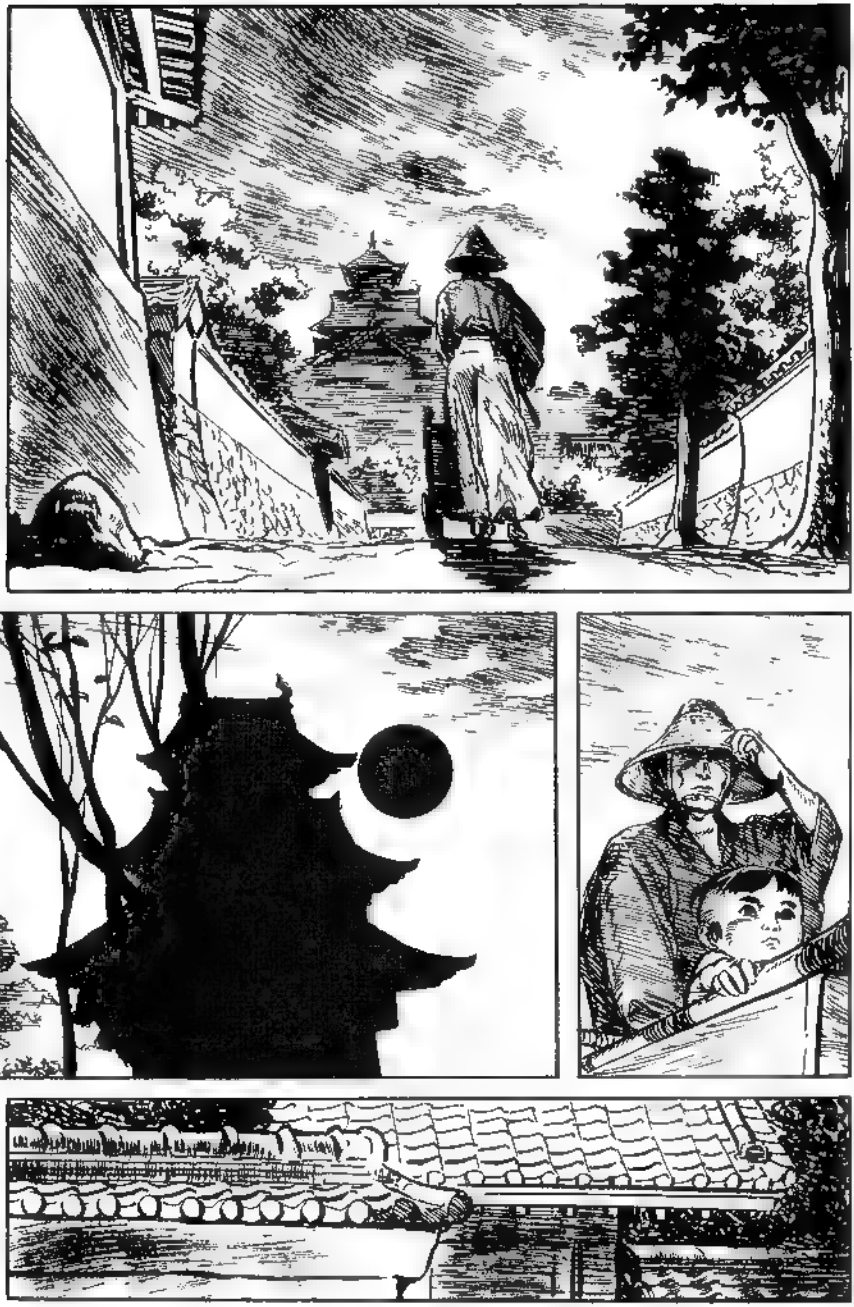
AND YOU SAY YOU THINK THERE'S SOME YAGYŪ SECRET HERE?
WE ENTERED THE JAWS OF DEATH TO GET THIS LETTER.
YET IT SEEMS PERFECTLY ORDINARY.
THEY'VE BEEN CALLED THE "YAGYŪ LETTERS"
I KNOW FOR A FACT THEY CONCEAL SOME VITAL SECRET OF THE URA-YAGYŪ
PERHAPS IT'S SPECIAL PAPER? HAVE YOU CHECKED FOR THAT?
I'VE TRIED FIRE, WATER, EARTH, ACID EXPOSING IT TO HEAT, SOAKING IT NOTHING

WELL, I'M MYSTIFIED
EVEN SUCH A SCHOLAR AS YOU, WAJŌ ? YOU WERE OUR FINAL HOPE
SO BE IT
AH? IN NAGASAKI HAN IN ECHIGO THERE'S A SECRETARY TO THE DAIMYŌ NAMED KURUSHIMA SHUMI HE'S AN OLD, DEAR FRIEND, AND REGARDING SECRET LETTERS
THEY SAY THERE IS NOTHING HE DOES NOT KNOW
I SHALL WRITE YOU AN INTRODUCTION TRY THERE.
I CANNOT THANK YOU ENOUGH
HOW WELL HE SLEEPS
IF ONLY HIS MOTHER COULD SEE HIM

MY APOLOGIES. I SHOULD NOT HAVE SAID THAT.
POOR CHILD.
AT LEAST HE CAN OFFER A PRAYER AT HIS MOTHER'S GRAVE.
KAAW
KAAW
THIS WAS HIS MOTHER'S HOMELAND

EXPELLED FROM EDO, ITTŌ HAD CARRIED HER ASHES HERE FOR BURIAL..
THREE LONG YEARS AGO

SPSSH
IT WAS THE FIRST TIME THE BOY HAD PRAYED AT HIS MOTHER'S GRAVE.
BUT DID HE REAL ZE HIS MOTHER'S SPIRIT SLEPT IN THE EARTH, HERE WHERE HE BOWED HIS HEAD OR NO?
HIS FATHER WOULD TELL HIM NOTHING.



*KURUSHIMA
I KNOW IT'S IRREGULAR. FORGIVE US.
YET IT PUZZLES ME THAT THIS LETTER FROM HIM LEAVES OUT YOUR NAME. IT CALLS YOU AN ACQUAINTANCE, NOTHING MORE.
OF COURSE I'LL DO ANYTHING FOR ONE RECOMMENDED BY THE WAJŌ
SHOULD I REVEAL OUR IDENTITY, IT MIGHT BRING TROUBLE DOWN UPON YOUR HOUSE.
PLEASE UNDER-STAND
THERE MUST BE SOME EXTRAORDINARY CIRCUMSTANCE. YET IF THE WAJŌ ASKS, HOW CAN I REFUSE? SO—WHAT WOULD YOU LIKE ME TO INSPECT?

THIS IS THE LETTER
ALLOW ME..
THIS-! IT'S A SHOGUNATE MEMORANDUM?!
THERE IS SOME SECRET CONCEALED IN IT
THAT IS WHAT I HOPE YOU CAN FIND
HRM..
YOU'VE TRIED FIRE, EARTH AND WATER? ACID?
ALL
AND THE TEXT ISN'T IN CODE?

I HAVE REASON TO BELIEVE THE TEXT IS NOT THE KEY
HMM.
MAY I ASK YOU TO WAIT HERE? IF IT'S NOT THE *PAPER*, AND NOT A *CIPHER* THEN IT CAN ONLY BE THE *INK*.
THE *INK*?!
INDEED. THERE ARE MORE THAN A HUNDRED VARIETIES OF *SUMI* WRITING INK. I'LL NEED SOME TIME TO INVESTIGATE
THERE *MAY* BE A CLUE FOR US HERE, SOMEWHERE, BUT I'LL NEED TO USE MY STUDIO EQUIPMENT
DO AS YOU MUST

SHAKK

IF I SOLD THIS TO THE URA-YAGYŪ
I'M SURE THEY'D PAY QUITE WELL!
THEN YOU'VE FOUND THE ANSWER?!
I HAVE! THIS IS ONE OF THE RUMORED YAGYŪ LETTERS! AND YOU'RE THE FORMER KŌGI KAISHAKUNIN, ŌGAMI ITTŌ!
OR SHOULD I SAY LONE WOLF AND CUB, ASSASSIN OF VENGEANCE?!

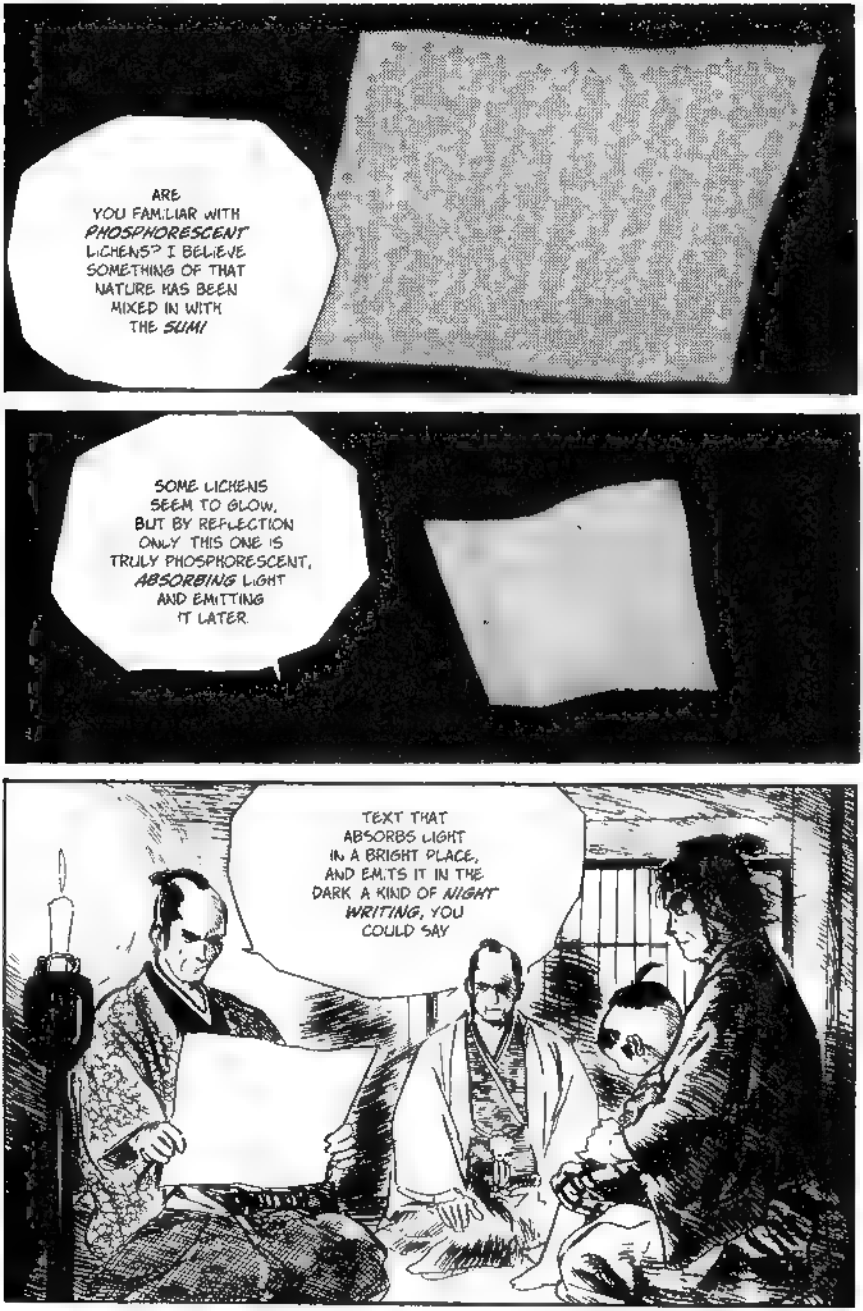
IF I WEIGH YOU AGAINST THE ERA YAGYU WOULD BE HEAVIER?
IF I ORDER THESE MEN TO ATTACK WHAT WILL YOU DO?
CAN YOU, BURDENED WITH YOUR CHILD, PIERCE THE SWORD WALL OF MAGAOKA'S BEST? OR NOT?

FATHER AND SON, WE LIVE IN MEIFUMADO!
WE ACCEPT THE TRIALS OF THE SIX PATHS AND THE FOUR LIVES!
KNOW!

FLY! YOU'LL BE
TRADING THIS
HONORED LIFE
FOR GLORY!

F-FALL BACK!
GO!
ISHIZEKI WYŌBU, JŌDAN KAMEŌ OF NAGAOKA HAN! PLEASE FORGIVE THIS AFFRONT!

I SEEK AN ASSASSIN! I NEEDED TO SEE
SO WILL YOU ACCEPT?
FOR AN ASSASSINATION, FIVE HUNDRED RYŌ!
AND YOU MUST TELL ME EVERYTHING!
NOT . NOT EVEN IN TRADE FOR THIS LETTER?
NEVER!
THAT IS ONE MATTER, THIS ANOTHER . IF YOU REFUSE TO RETURN IT, I'LL BUILD A MOUNTAIN OF CORPSES TO GET IT BACK!
IF THE SECRET GOES UNSOLVED, SO BE IT!


ARE YOU FAMILIAR WITH *PHOSPHORESCENT* LICHENS? I BELIEVE SOMETHING OF THAT NATURE HAS BEEN MIXED IN WITH THE *SUMI*
SOME LICHENS SEEM TO GLOW, BUT BY REFLECTION ONLY THIS ONE IS TRULY PHOSPHORESCENT, *ABSORBING* LIGHT AND EMITTING IT LATER.
TEXT THAT ABSORBS LIGHT IN A BRIGHT PLACE, AND EMITS IT IN THE DARK A KIND OF *NIGHT WRITING*, YOU COULD SAY

A INGENIOUS INNOVATION INDEED ..
AND YET . WHAT I DON'T UNDERSTAND IS THE PURPOSE. YES, YOU CAN READ IN THE DARK. BUT WHAT OTHER GOOD IS IT?
THERE'S NOTHING IN THIS LETTER THAT REQUIRES SECRECY AT ALL.
WHY DOES THE KYOTO SHOSHIDAI USE SUCH UNUSUAL INK?
BECAUSE HE DOESN'T KNOW HE'S USING IT
WHAT?!
THE YAGYŪ ARE BEHIND THIS. NO DOUBT THEY'VE SWITCHED THE INK OF THE SHOSHIDAI, THE JŌDAI OF ŌSAKA CASTLE, AND EVERY KEY OFFICIAL IN THE SHŌGUNATE. THEY ALL USE THIS INK WITHOUT KNOWING IT
BUT.. WHY?!
THE DAY WE FIND THE ANSWER IS THE DAY WE FACE THE YAGYŪ, ONCE AND FOR ALL.

YOU'VE SOLVED ONE PART OF THE MYSTERY
MY THANKS.
NOW. .
TELL ME ABOUT THE ASSASSI-NATION.

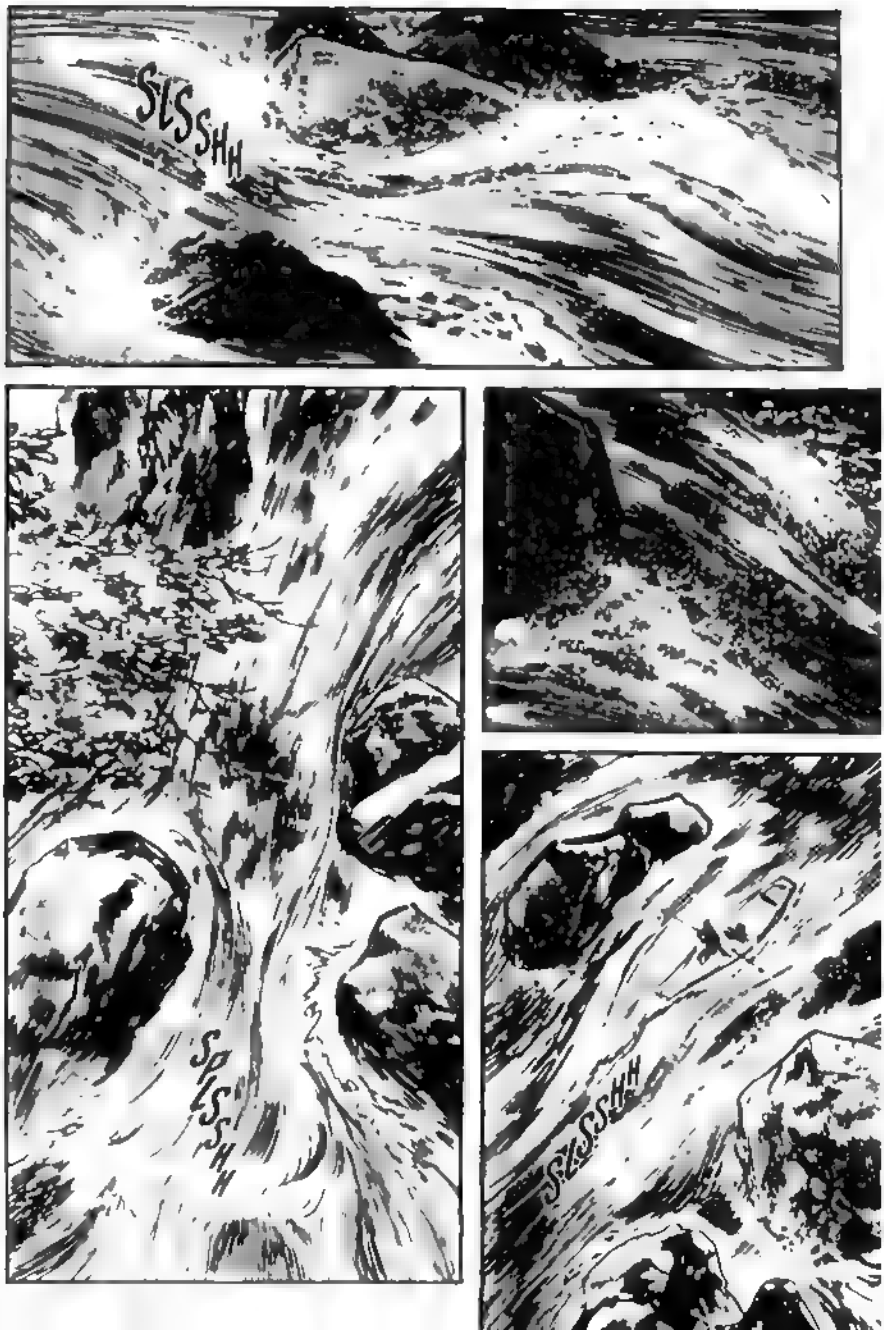
THE FIRE BROKE OUT WITHOUT WARNING JUST A SMALL BLAZE IN THE BARRACKS NEAR THE GATE OF THE MAIN KEEP, BUT THE HOWLING WINDS THAT DAY FANNED IT HIGHER IT LEAPT THE WALLS AND SPREAD TO THE KEEP AND THE SECOND TURRET THEN THERE WAS NO STOPPING IT

I'LL BACK! EVACUATE! LEAVE ME I'LL BACK!
B-BUT, SIR! THE TREASURE GUARD WILL DIE A THOUSAND DEATHS IF THE FAMILY TREASURES BURN

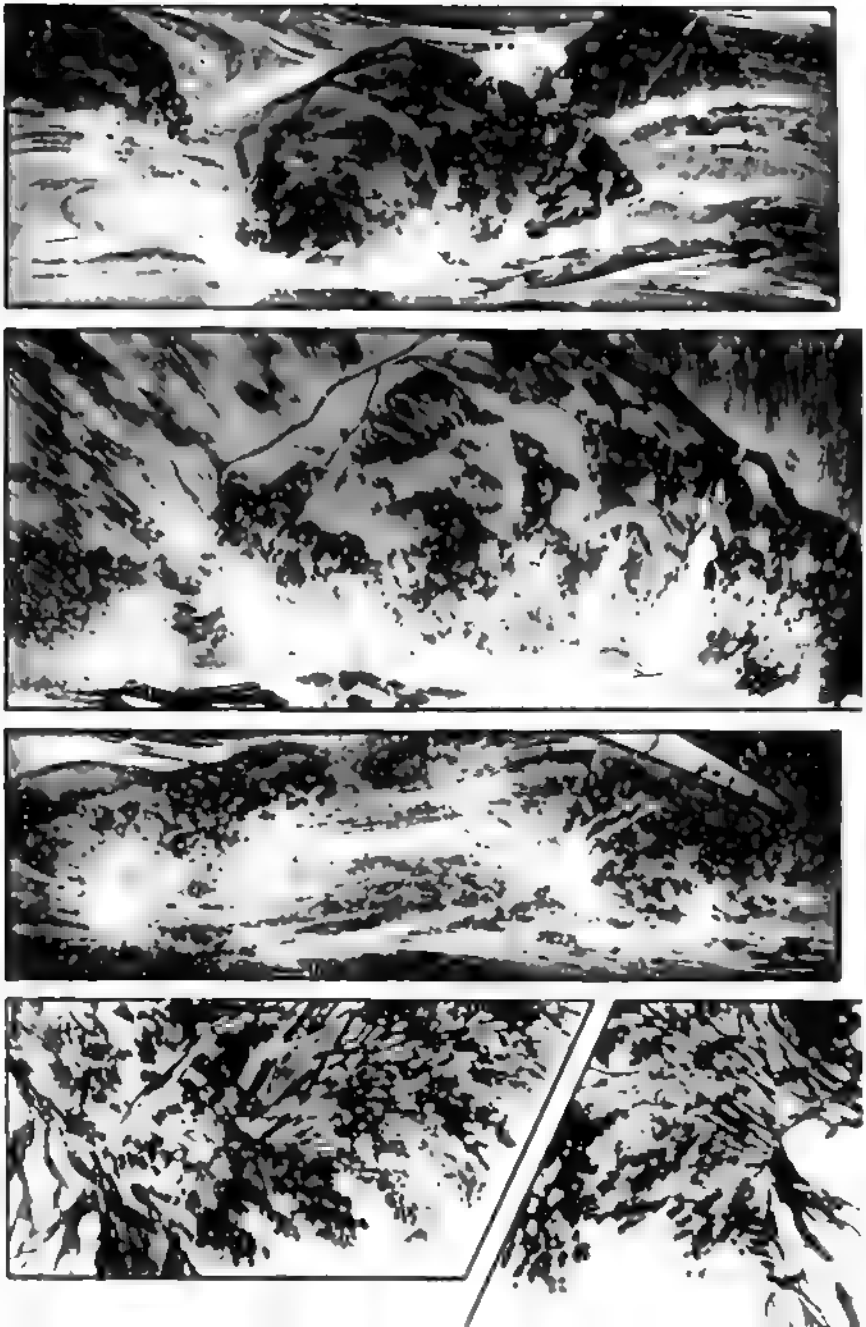
AT LEAST LET US MOVE THEM TO SAFETY!
IT'S TOO LATE! EVACUATE!
SIR, WE'RE READY TO DIE! WE'LL GUARD THE TREASURES TO THE DEATH!
NON-SENSE! FALL BACK!
THAT'S A DIRECT ORDER!! RETREAT!!

THE FAMILY TREASURES WERE KEPT IN THE CASTLE KEEP. ZAKO GENNOSHIN LED THE TWENTY-SIX MEN OF THE CASTLE GUARD TO FIGHT THE FIRE.
BUT FOR SOME REASON, ZAKO WAS SEIZED BY COWARDICE! HE FORCED HIS MEN TO BACK TO SAFETY, AND THE FAMILY TREASURES WERE LOST! IT WAS AN ACT BEYOND COMPREHENSION FOR A BUSHI!
AND THAT WASN'T ALL-THAT VERY DAY, ZAKO FLED THE FIRE AND HIS RESPONSIBILITY
OF COURSE, DUTY DEMANDS THAT WE PURSUE AND KILL KIM FOR OUR LORD! YET THE MAN IS SUCH A MASTER OF THE KAMAYARI TWO-POINTED SPEAR THAT SOME TALK OF THE ZAKO-RYŪ SCHOOL OF SPEAR COMBAT! WE WOULD LOSE MANY OF OUR BEST MEN TO KILL HIM.
YET WE'D BE THE LAUGHINGSTOCK OF THE NATION IF WE SENT OUR ARCHERS AND RIFLE UNITS AGAINST HIM. ALL THAT TO KILL A SINGLE MAN?!

ŌGAMI-DONO, DESTINY BROUGHT YOU HERE IN OUR HOUR OF NEED.
TAKE ZAKO GENNOSHIN'S LIFE—WE BEG YOU!
YES, IT'S A MYSTERY
WHY WOULD SUCH A MAN, MASTER OF THE SPEAR..
THEY SAY EVEN THE FIERCEST WARRIOR CAN BE SUDDENLY STRICKEN BY FEAR ON THE BATTLEFIELD. PERHAPS WHEN ZAKO WAS SURROUNDED BY FLAMES..? IN ANY CASE, WE *COUNT* ON YOU.
A TOKEN OF THANKS. FOR YOUR HELP WITH THE LETTER.
SWISH!


SLSSHH
SPLSSHH
SPLSSHH

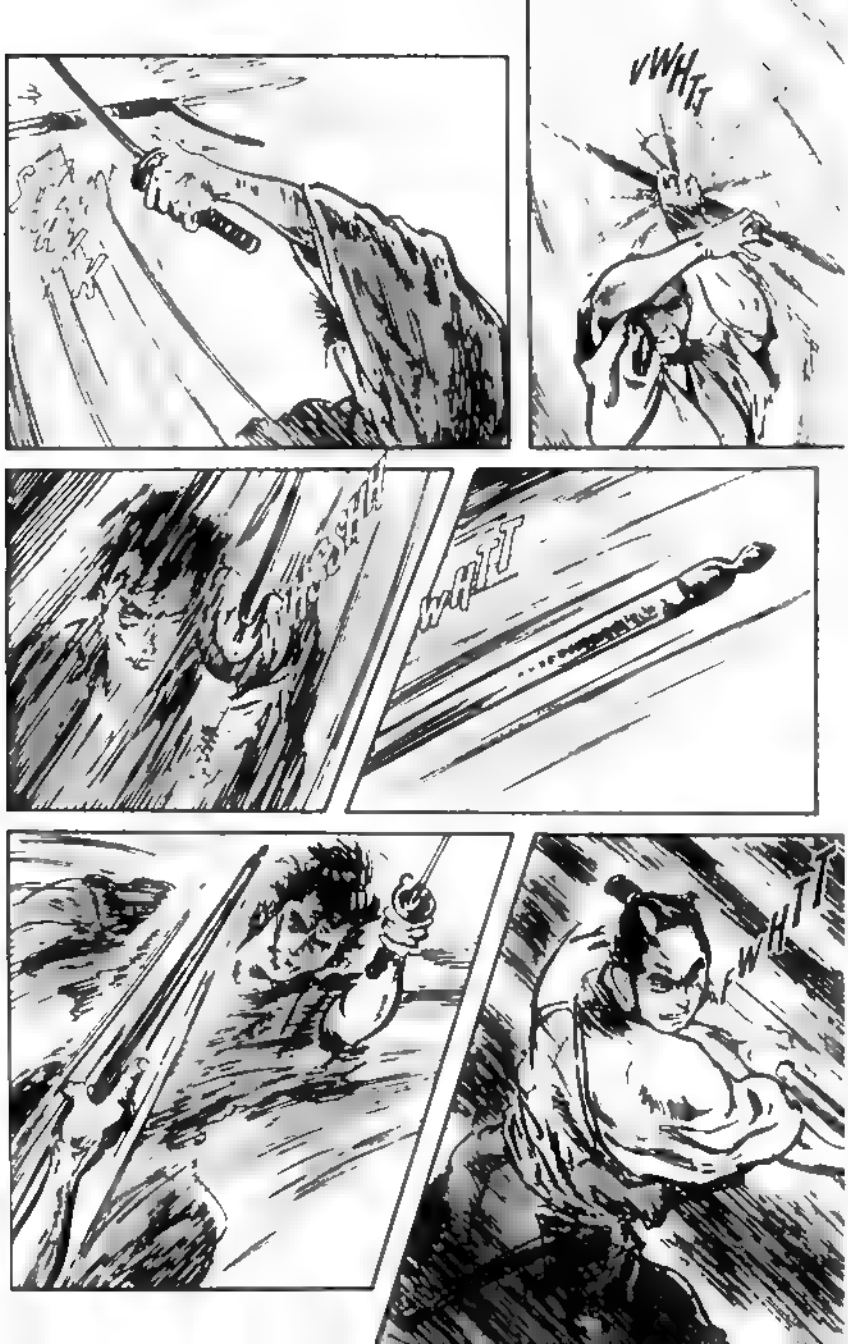
FWHDD
WHBLOOSH



SKLSSH

YOU CARRY YOUR SPEAR UNCOVERED, IN READINESS FOR ALL ATTACKERS ARE YOU ZAKO GENNOSHIN?
INDEED! I BARE MY BLADE AS ONE WHO MARCHES TO HIS DEATH
YOU'VE BEEN SENT BY NAGAOKA HAN?
ASSAS-SIN...
LONE WOLF AND CUB!

WHIFF
GIVE ME NO QUARTER!
WHOOSH


vWHTT
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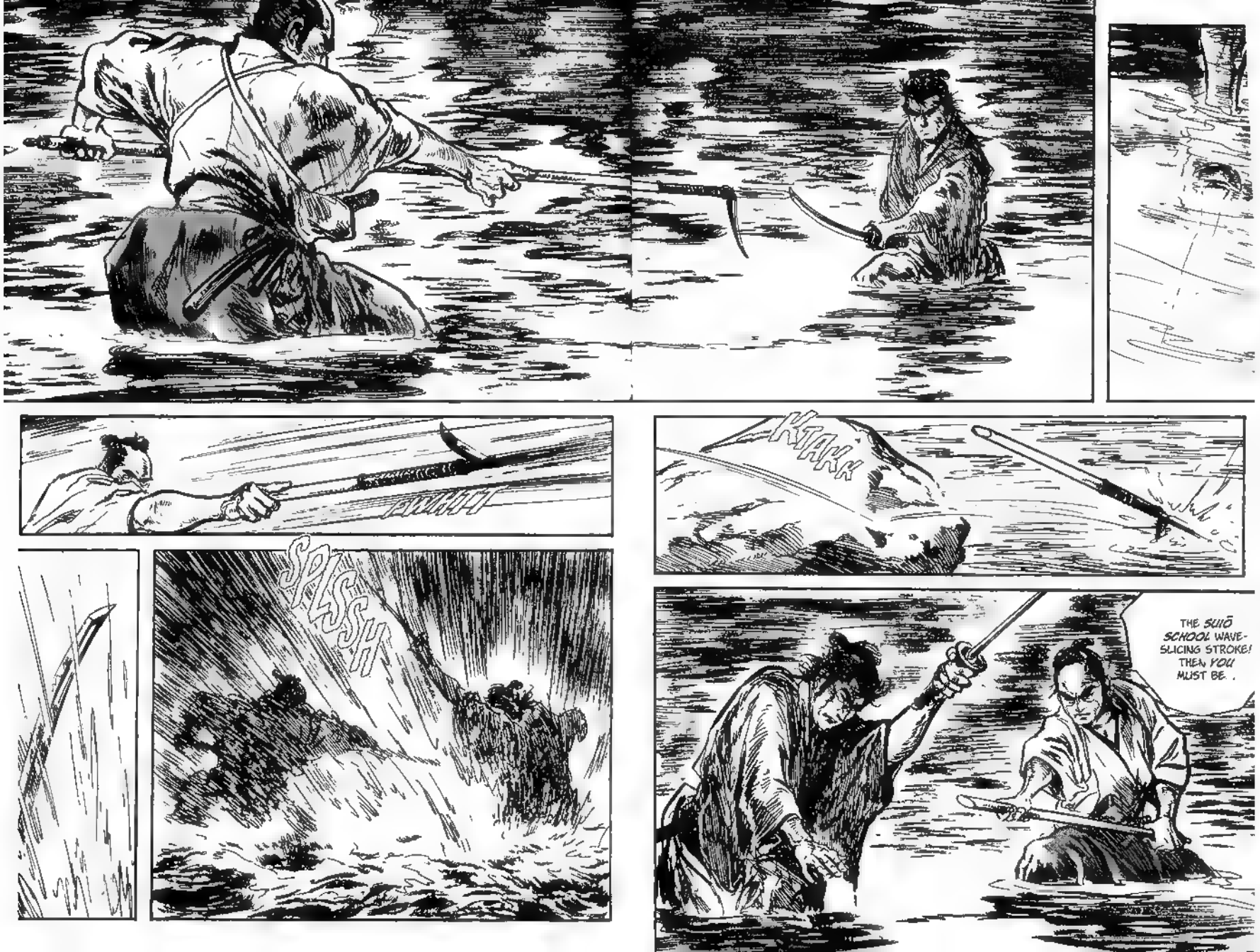
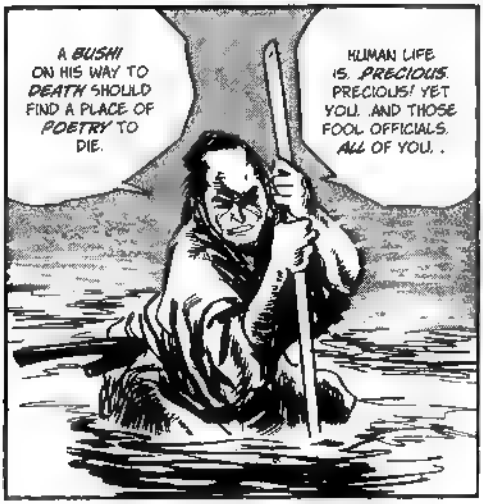
KSHNG
SPANGG


KTAKK
SPLSSH
THE SUIŌ SCHOOL WAVE-SLICING STROKE! THEN YOU MUST BE .

ŌGAMI ITTŌ, FORMER KŌGI KAISHAKUNIN.
I KNEW IT
I
ONCE YOU CUT OFF THE HEADS OF DAIMYŌ. NOW YOU CUT OFF THE LIVES OF MEN AS A PAID ASSASSIN.
I HAVE A QUESTION FOR A MAN LIKE YOU.
I BELIEVE THERE'S NOTHING MORE PRECIOUS THAN A HUMAN LIFE AND ALL THE MORE SO THE LIFE OF A BUSHI, WHO LIVES READY TO DIE FOR HIS LORD SUCH A LIFE SHOULD NEVER BE SACRIFICED LIGHTLY
A CASTLE BURNT CAN BE BUILT ANEW NEW TREASURES CAN BE BOUGHT BUT I TELL YOU, ASSASSIN.
...THE DEAD CANNOT BE BROUGHT BACK TO LIFE!
THAT DAY

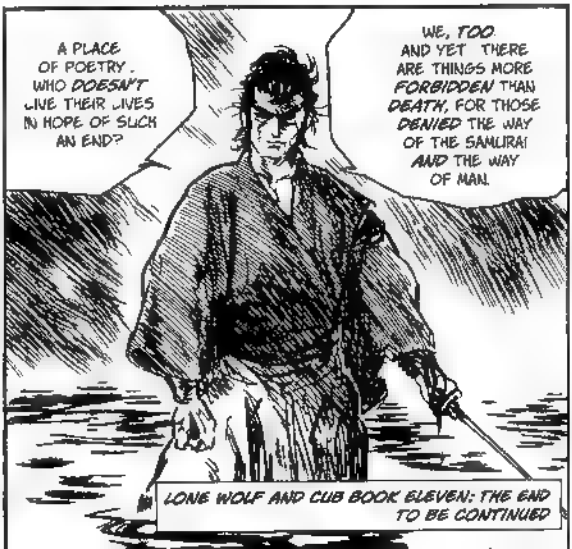
THAT DAY THE FIRE MOVED LIKE LIGHTNING HAD WE HELD OUR GROUND, WE ALL WOULD HAVE PERISHED IN THE FLAMES
THAT WAS WHY I ORDERED MY MEN TO SAFETY
. . . .
. . . .
THE LIFE OF A BUSHI SHOULD BE OFFERED UP TO HIS LORD! NOT TO A CASTLE NOT TO A TREASURE! THIS WAS NO BATTLE THAT WOULD DECIDE THE FATE OF THE CLAN! IT WAS A FIRE, NOTHING MORE
AND FURTHER, TO CHASTISE THOSE HIGH OFFICIALS WHO SCRAMBLED SO FRANTICALLY TO SHIRK THEIR OWN RESPONSIBILITY
I FLED THE MAN TO ENSURE THAT THE MEN WHO HAD FOLLOWED MY ORDERS AND EVACUATED WOULD NOT BE CRITICIZED NOR HELD RESPONSIBLE. I DID IT TO TAKE ALL RESPONSIBILITY UPON MYSELF
AND SO I WOULD ASK ONE THING OF YOU! I DON'T CARE WHAT VENGEANCE YOU SEEK. CAN YOU EVER BE FORGIVEN FOR BECOMING AN ASSASSIN, AND TAKING INNOCENT LIVES?!
PERHAPS YOU'LL ACHIEVE YOUR ENDS BY SUCH MEANS BUT YOU WON'T DESERVE TO BE CALLED A BUSHI YOU WON'T DESERVE TO BE CALLED HUMAN!


A BUSHI ON HIS WAY TO DEATH SHOULD FIND A PLACE OF POETRY TO DIE.
HUMAN LIFE IS PRECIOUS. PRECIOUS! YET YOU. AND THOSE FOOL OFFICIALS. ALL OF YOU. .

FATHER AND SON, WE LIVE IN MEIFUMADŌ
NOT BUSHI, NOT HUMAN.

MEIFUMADO, YOU SAY ? TO ME. T SOUNDS LIKE. AN EXCUSE FOR YOUR OWN VENGEANCE. NOTHING MORE.
DON'T HIDE BEHIND IT ! STRIP IT AWAY ! A MAN IS A MAN A LIFE IS A LIFE..

SPLSH


A PLACE OF POETRY . WHO DOESN'T LIVE THEIR LIVES IN HOPE OF SUCH AN END?
WE, TOO. AND YET THERE ARE THINGS MORE FORBIDDEN THAN DEATH, FOR THOSE DENIED THE WAY OF THE SAMURAI AND THE WAY OF MAN.
LONE WOLF AND CUB BOOK ELEVEN: THE END
TO BE CONTINUED

GLOSSARY

bushi
A samurai. A member of the warrior class.

bushidō
The way of the warrior.

chūsei
The old educational system's equivalent to high-school students.

daimyō
A feudal lord.

daisei
The old educational system's equivalent to college students.

dōtanuki
A battle sword. Literally, "sword that cuts through torsos."

Edo
The capital of medieval Japan and the seat of the shogunate. The site of modern-day Tokyo.

han
A feudal domain.

hanshi
Samurai in the service of a *han*.

hatamoto
Daimyō considered utterly loyal to the Tokugawa clan, with the right to meet the shōgun face to face. Their title, "standard bearers," came from history, when the warriors who would be promoted in peacetime to *hatamoto* had been the most trusted allies of Tokugawa Ieyasu, the first of the Tokugawa shoguns.

honorifics
Japan is a class and status society, and proper forms of address are critical. Common markers of respect are the prefixes *o* and *go*, and a wide range of suffixes. Some of the suffixes you will encounter in *Lone Wolf and Cub*:
dono archaic; used for higher-ranked or highly respected figures.
sama used for superiors.

jōdai
Castle warden. The ranking *han* official in charge of a *daimyō*'s castle and *han* when the *daimyō* was in residence in Edo.

kago-sho
A peasant petition to the shōgunate, indicting a *han*'s leadership for abuses. Those delivering such a petition did so knowing that they would be executed for insolence, whether the *han* was found guilty or not.

karō
Elders, usually the senior advisor to a *daimyō*. Since the daimyō was required to alternate each year between life in his castle in the han and his residence in Edo, there was usually an *Edo-karo* (Edo elder) and a *kuni-karō* (*han* elder) who would administer affairs when their lord was away.

katsu
The shout of a Zen priest, meant to jolt a student into self-awareness.

kōgi kaishakunin
The shōgun's own second, who performed executions ordered by the shōgun.

koto
A traditional Japanese zither. The thirteen silk strings are tuned by moving individual ivory bridges.

Kyoto shoshidai
The shōgun's emissary to the Imperial Court in Kyoto. Although real power lay with the shogun in Edo, the shogunate maintained the fiction that the emperor was the ultimate authority in Japan. The *shoshidai* maintained contact with the imperial household and the aristocracy, and oversaw tax collection and other shōgunate business in the old capital.

meifumadō
The Buddhist Hell. The way of demons and damnation.

Meirin-kan
Each *han* had its own school for the children of *hanshi* retainers. The school in Hagi was called the Meirin-kan.

o-niwaban
A ninja. Literally, "one in the garden." Ninja had their heyday in the time of warring states before the rise of the Tokugawa clan. Originally mercenaries serving different warlords, by the Edo period they were in the service of the central government. The most famous were the ninja of Iga and Kaga, north of Kyoto. The Kurokuwa that appear in *Lone Wolf and Cub* were officially the laborers and manual workers in Edo Castle. Whether they truly served as a secret spy corps is lost in history.

Ōsaka Castle
The largest castle outside of Edo, originally built by Hideyoshi Toyotomi, the first unifier of Japan. After the Tokugawa clan took the castle by siege, it became their stronghold in western Japan, from which they monitored the activities of the unruly western *han*.

rōjū
Senior councilors. The inner circle of councilors directly advising the shogun. The *rōju* were the ultimate advisory body to the Tokugawa shogunate's national government.

rōnin
A masterless samurai. Literally, "one adrift on the waves."

ryō
A gold piece, worth 60 *monme* or 4 *kan*.

ryū
Often translated as "school." The many variations of swordsmanship and other martial arts were passed down from generation to generation to the offspring of the originator of the technique or set of techniques, and to any *deshi* students that sought to learn from the master.

Shōheikō
The shogunate's institute of higher learning, founded in Edo in 1691. It was named after the birthplace of Confucius.

shosei
The old educational system's equivalent to middle-school students.

sōmeishu
A master village chieftain. In Edo Japan, a select handful of *meishu* (village chieftains) were assigned official duties by the *machibugyō* (Edo city commissioner) and local *daikan* (magistrate). Peasants were forbidden to bear arms and had no family names, but these select few were given special dispensation to wear a sword and pass down their family name. A *someishu* spoke for all the *meishu* of the *han*.

sumi
Japanese ink, used for calligraphy and *sumi-e* (ink paintings). It comes in a solid block and is wetted with water in a tray.

urameshiya
"Vengeance." The traditional wail of Japanese ghosts. A threat of this sort was considered very real and frightening.

Wajō
A term of respect for a high priest or the head of a temple.

KAZUO KOIKE

Though widely respected as a powerful writer of graphic fiction, Kazuo Koike has spent a lifetime reaching beyond the bounds of the comics medium. Aside from co-creating and writing the successful *Lone Wolf and Cub* and *Crying Freeman* manga, Koike has hosted television programs, founded a golf magazine, produced movies, written popular fiction, poetry, and screenplays, and mentored some of Japan's best manga talent.

Lone Wolf and Cub was first serialized in Japan in 1970 (under the title *Kozure Okami*) in *Manga Action* magazine and continued its hugely popular run for many years, being collected as the stories were published, and reprinted worldwide. Koike collected numerous awards for his work on the series throughout the next decade. Starting in 1972, Koike adapted the popular manga into a series of six films, the *Baby Cart Assassin* saga, garnering widespread commercial success and critical acclaim for his screenwriting.

This wasn't Koike's only foray into film and video. In 1996, *Crying Freeman*, the manga Koike created with artist Ryoichi Ikegami, was produced in Hollywood and released to commercial success in Europe and is currently awaiting release in America.

And to give something back to the medium that gave him so much, Koike started the *Sekiga Sonjuku*, a college course aimed at helping talented writers and artists -- such as *Ranma 1/2* creator Rumiko Takahashi -- break into the comics field.

The driving focus of Koike's narrative is character development, and his commitment to character is clear: "Comics are carried by characters. If a character is well created, the comic becomes a hit." Kazuo Koike's continued success in comics and literature has proven this philosophy true.

GOSEKI KOJIMA

Goseki Kojima was born on November 3, 1928, the very same day as the godfather of Japanese comics, Osamu Tezuka. While just out of junior high school, the self-taught Kojima began painting advertising posters for movie theaters to pay his bills.

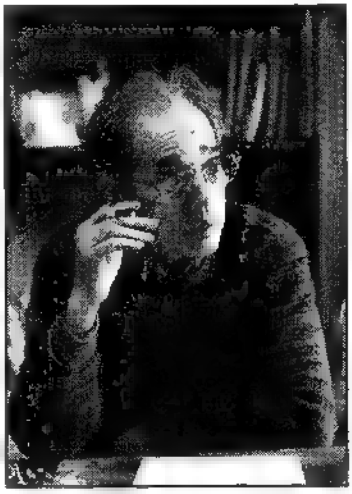
In 1950, Kojima moved to Tokyo, where the postwar devastation had given rise to special manga forms for audiences too poor to buy the new manga magazines. Kojima created art for *kami shibai*, or "paper-play" narrators, who would use manga story sheets to present narrated street plays. Kojima moved on to creating works for the *kashi bon* market, bookstores that rented out books, magazines, and manga to mostly low-income readers. He soon became highly popular among *kashi-bon* readers.

In 1967, Kojima broke into the magazine market with his series *Dojinki*. As the manga magazine market grew and diversified, he turned out a steady stream of popular series.

In 1970, in collaboration with Kazuo Koike, Kojima began the work that would seal his reputation, *Kozure Okami* (*Lone Wolf and Cub*). Before long the story had become a gigantic hit, eventually spinning off a television series, six motion pictures, and even theme-song records. Koike and Kojima were soon dubbed the "golden duo" and produced success after success on their way to the pinnacle of the manga world.

When *Manga Japan* magazine was launched in 1994, Kojima was asked to serve as consultant, and he helped train the next generation of manga artists.

In his final years, Kojima turned to creating original graphic novels based on the movies of his favorite director, Akira Kurosawa. Kojima passed away on January 5, 2000 at the age of 71.



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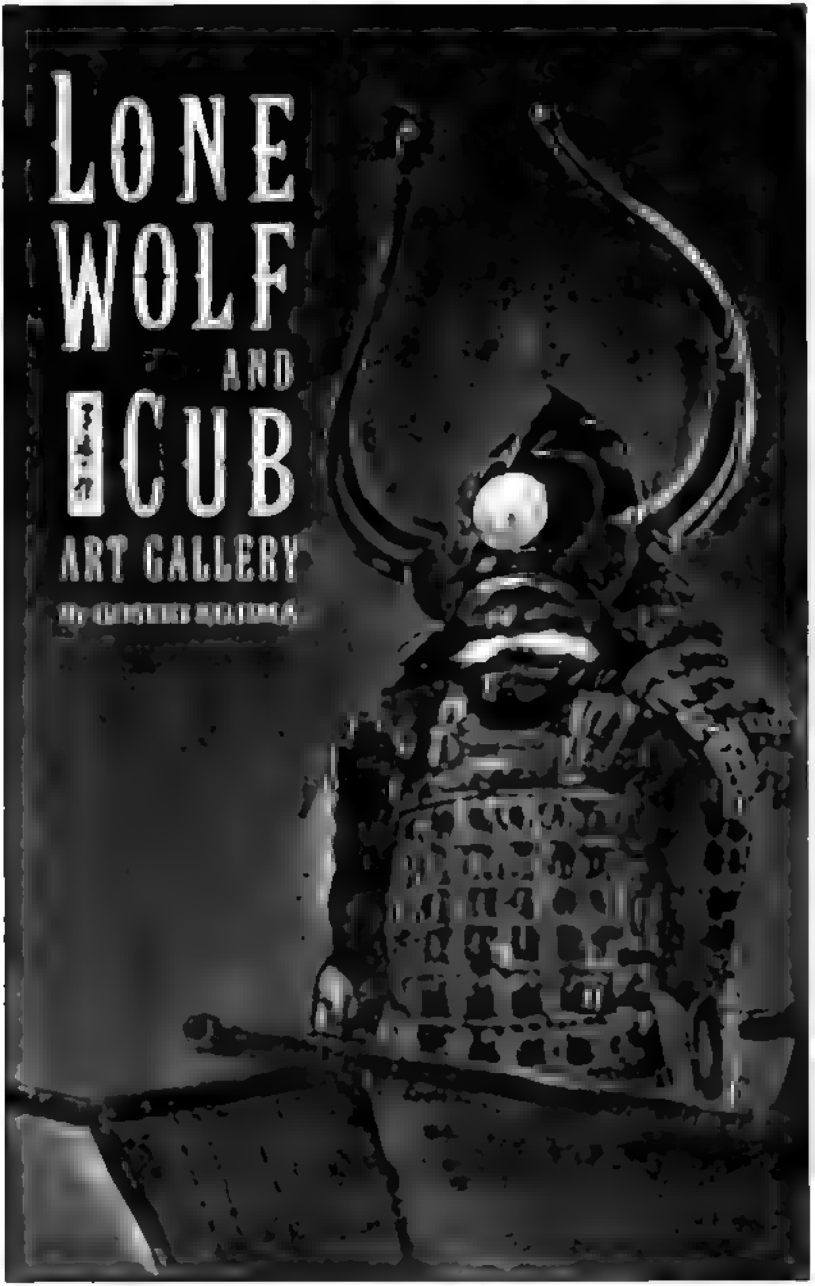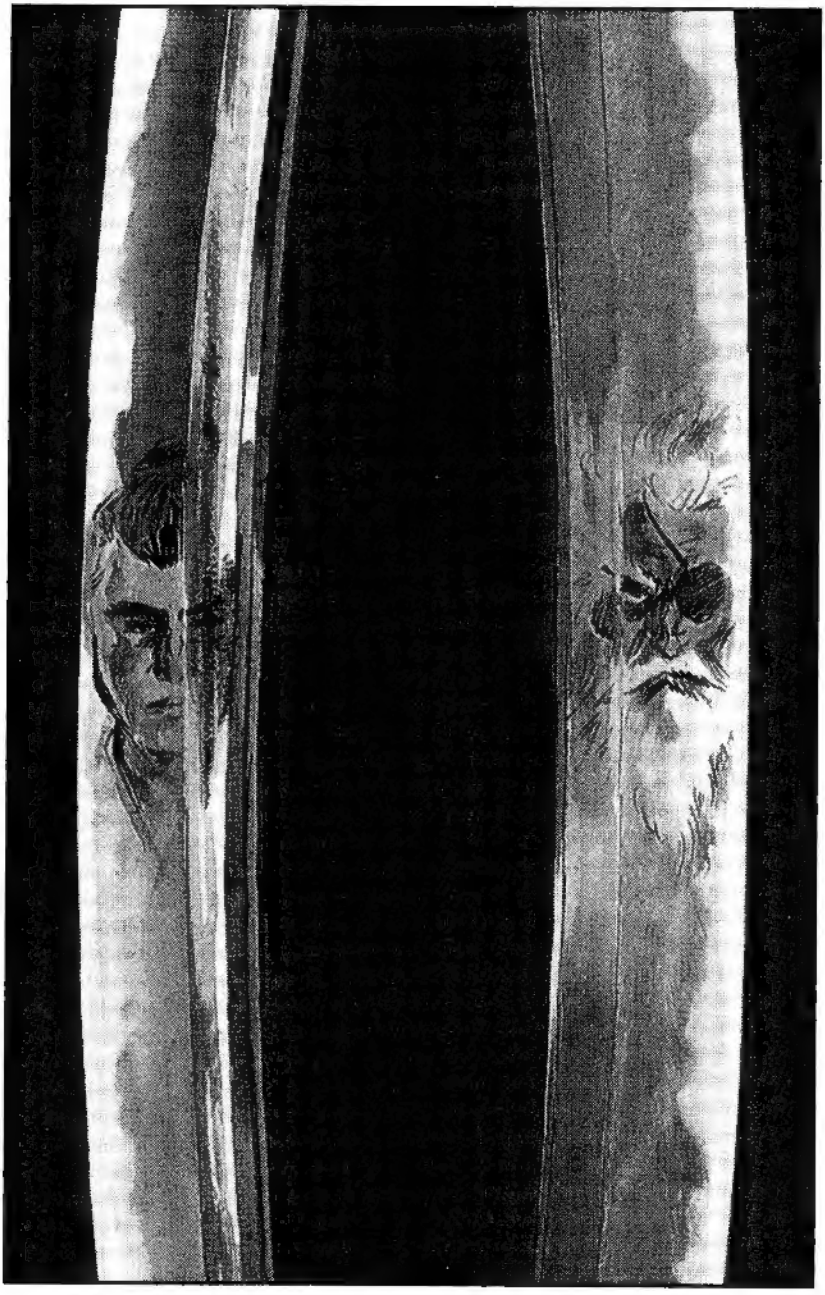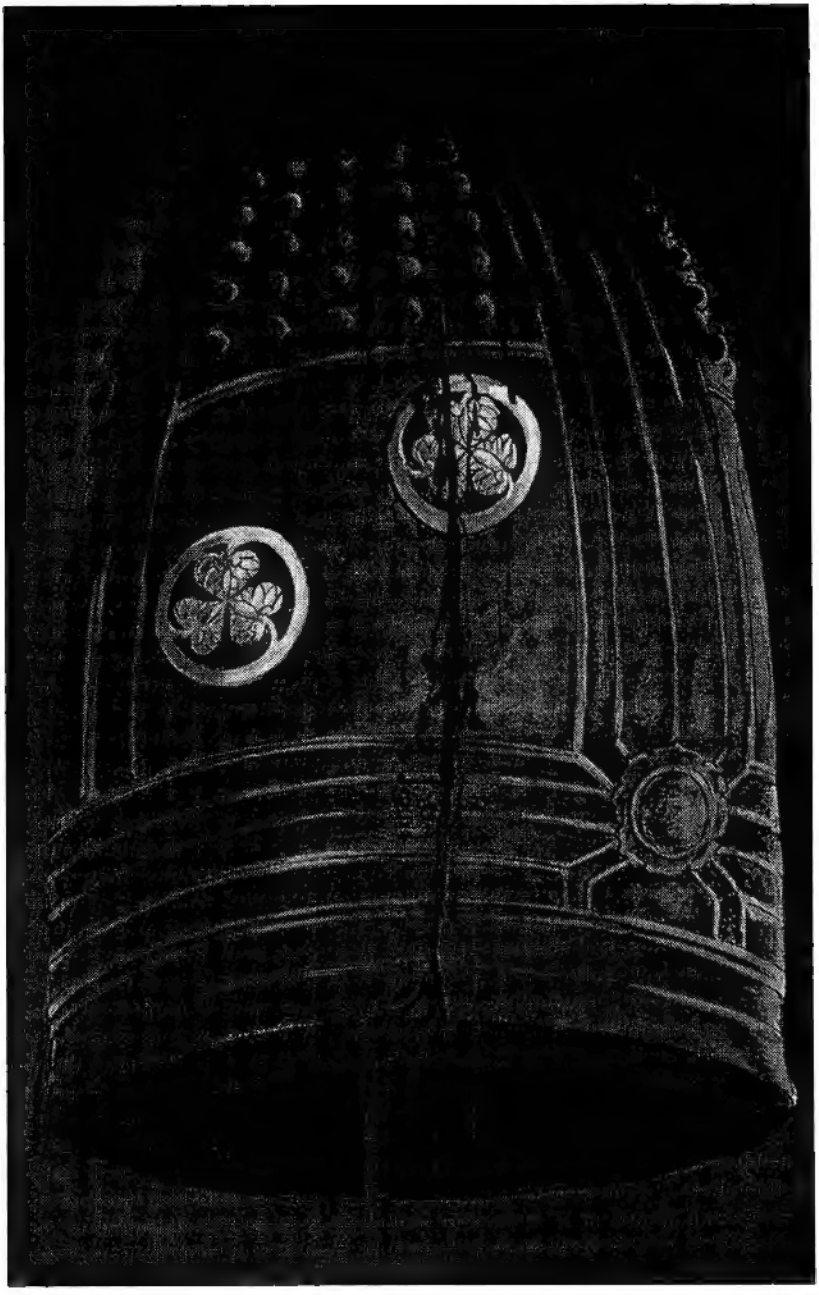
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